EMPOWERING WOMEN WHO ARE CONFINED IN A TRADITIONAL CHURCH SETTING TO CONFRONT BIAS

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
December, 2014

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT v

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS vi

DEDICATION ix

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

1. MINISTRY FOCUS 5
2. THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL 20
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION 31
4. METHODOLOGY 78
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE 100
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION 152

APPENDIX

A. PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY 179

B. ICE BREAKER 181

C. PRE TEST QUESTIONNAIRE 183

D. PRE TEST SURVEY RESULTS 186

E. ASSESSMENT TEST QUESTIONS 188

F. PARTICIPANT LESSON PLANS 190

G. BIBLICAL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS AND EXTRA READINGS 225

H. POST SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE TEST RESULTS.....236

I. EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....238

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....240

ABSTRACT

EMPOWERING WOMEN WHO ARE CONFINED
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by
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United Theological Seminary, 2014

Faculty Mentors
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This project will provide a means of empowering women at the Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church and provide them with tools that enable them to confront bias. The objective is to bring a sense of justice and equality to women of God who have previously felt disempowered by reading the Bible within the context of a patriarchal setting. The hypothesis is that the use of this focused teaching and training with the women of Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church will give them the tools needed to empower others. An eight week qualitative training course will be administered by the author.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It was the Holy Spirit that led me to this place. It was the Holy Spirit that brought me through. I am thankful. God is my source, my strength, my everything and I acknowledge God as the creator and giver of life. I give God praise for bringing to fruition the gifts inside of me to be used to His glory.

I would also like to acknowledge my mentors, Dr. Randy Grimes. Dr. Grimes has to be given the gift to be a blessing to his mentees. Thank you for understanding me in the midst of my storms. Thank you for knowing when to meet me with a stern hand and also with the wisdom of God. Your determination and efforts to pull forth what God has imparted in me was a stretch but we succeeded. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Be forever bless as you continue to lead God's people. Dr. Leroy Cothran, thank you for stepping in with your expertise, being an available vessel, and being used by God to impart your knowledge onto me. Thank you for praying for me, for pushing me forward and believing in me to have the courage to put on paper what God was speaking in my spirit. Dr. David Whitford, I thank you for challenging me, for giving me food for thought and for sharing your gifts and time with me. Dr. Harold Hudson, you are extremely generous in all the time, effort and encouragement you have given me through the years. Your encouragement inside and out the classroom is a beacon of light for each of us and I am grateful you saw the potential in me before I realized the great potential

inside of me. Continue to be the man of God and the inspiration you bring to United Theological Seminary. Thank you for being a great mentor, teacher and role model for my aspirations to become more than I could imagine in the presence of greatness. Dr. Stephen Swisher, thank you for always having an encouraging word, a willing heart and the devotion and commitment to see me through this process. You went beyond the call of duty to make sure I would not surrender to the hardships of this endeavor, you always had an encouraging word and you strongly affirmed your belief in me. I am grateful, thank you. Dr. Dozeman, thank you for bringing adversity and conflict to my life that allowed me to look outside the parameters of my own thoughts. Your insistence for me to dig for the reasoning and the call within me was a learning experience that helps me bring forth this project. I was enlightened because of your wisdom and I was able to bring forth a project of objectivity, understanding and knowledge that will impact all who have the opportunity to walk in the wilderness through my journey. It was not easy but it was necessary. I would like to acknowledge Kenneth and Gloria Copeland along with Kelly Swisher for their contribution to my project.

I would like to acknowledge my professional associates, Dr. Maureen Collins, Dr. Iris Perkins, Dr. Linwood James, Dr. Earl Thompson, and Dr. Carol W. Robb. I say thank you Dr. Perkins for stepping up to the plate when needed most. I would like to do a special acknowledgment to my peer associate Cynthia Carter-Smallwood for her love, her prayers, her fortitude and friendship throughout this entire process. She was my ram in the bush. Thank you for not giving up on me when I felt like giving up on myself. The other person is Dr. Maureen Collins. Thank you for jumping in and always being available to walk me through this process. For all the hard work and dedication to my

project and for being a beaming light for Jesus, you two ladies show the love of God through your walk. I cannot express my gratitude for all you have done.

I would like to thank my classmates Cynthia Carter-Smallwood, Mike Scruggs, Sandra Burroughs, and Mona Davies for the amazing journey together.

I would like to also acknowledge my contributing editors, Dr. Lori Spears and Seantay Jackson, and others who read and re-read with me to complete this project. Your contributions are invaluable and I will never forget your help.

I would like to acknowledge Greater Hickory Hill Pastor, Rev. Joe H. Caple and First Lady Gracie Caple for letting me use Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church for my context. Thank you for all the context associates and volunteers for the completion and examination of this project.

I would like to thank Dr. Jason D. Pough for his patience, encouragement, direction and love throughout this project. Your time is appreciated and cherished. I love you. Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Lawrence Hood for his help and encouragement to help me succeed.

And finally, thank you to my family and friends which are too many to name for being prayerful and patient as I walked through this process. You have been my light in darkness when I felt like giving up. I say thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I appreciate each of you and words are not adequate to express my thankfulness, but I will say it anyway—thank you very much.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To the work He has placed before me I present tears, my best work and my triumph to be used to His glory.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my children, Malik and Maliah Taylor who are the most important people in my life. This is an example to what God will do when you believe. All things are possible with God. I desire that you two never give up on what God has placed inside of you. God has the final word and you are what God says you are. You are blessed and highly favored. You are set apart and called according to His purpose. Thank you for allowing me to sacrifice our time for God's glory. I love you both with all my heart.

INTRODUCTION

As an African American female minister, I am forced to deal with the bias and injustices that plague our society. For example bias that prohibit women from preaching because of patriarchal influences. Influences that derive from the masculinity of the Bible that seldom considers the historical foundation or rarely examined with a critical eye. Inclusive language is almost never used. Being in a safe haven and able to experience the wealth that comes with being a believer is the most important aspect of my journey, yet being Christian comes with adversities. Women in traditional church settings have suffered at the hands of patriarchal influences, and the masculine focus of the Bible has influenced women's experiences. However, theologians and feminists continue to debate as to what is truly the word of the Lord. I believe that it is important to explore what defines oppression, and what liberation looks like within the traditional church setting for women who are confronted with bias.

My intent, as the author of this project, is to open even further dialogue and to ban oppression from the sacred walls of church. The starting point involved exploring the hermeneutics in which we interpret the Bible. If we, as women, can find liberation in the text, then we can find justice for our weary souls. My own struggle began when I was young. I felt that I needed a more intimate relationship with God; however the process of developing that intimacy was met with hindrances that influenced me as well. I was told that as a woman, I needed to be under the submission of a man for God to honor my gift.

The obstacles were many, as I looked for God to define my humanity, and I realized that many women desire freedom from these same struggles.

I set out on my transformation from oppression to freedom, and began to resist those previous messages. My education had no limitations. I studied for my Masters of Divinity, and the vast amount of information broke the chains of religion off of me. God then provided the way through this experience, and my desire and hunger to be free surpassed the reality of the masculinity of the Bible. It broke the dams to injustices women feel in the church and alas, it opened the door to liberation. I am no longer fearful of confrontations or bias that plagues the church. I understand that these things will come, and have made up my mind that the word of God is meant to set the captives free. It is a vessel which, in any interpretation, is meant to exemplify the love of a just God. There are no more chains holding me, and my quest now is to retell the story. Through the process of retelling, I am afforded the opportunity to break the myths that steal the purpose and joy from women reading God's word, and I am empowered to help women reach other women in the same manner.

The proposed hypothesis is that by teaching women how to read the Bible in a liberated way and providing them resources; will help them to empower other women to discover their purpose, and to confront the bias that they face within a traditional church setting. Each session was developed to follow a regiment designed to enlighten the women participants toward self-discovery and knowledge of self-purpose. The following chapters will provide a detailed explanation of the model and will undergird the research and the methodology for the project implementation and field experience. Ultimately, a data analysis will be provided with the project summary and conclusion.

This thesis has six chapters. Chapter One describes my ministry and spiritual pilgrimage, and explains the model presented. In addition, this chapter explains my context ministry and describes my synergy. Finally, this section identifies the problem to be resolved and the proposed resolution.

Chapter Two explores the state of the art in ministry. This chapter defines the area which I am addressing in the model, provides specifications about the data collected, and details the insights underlying the model. This chapter allows the researcher to argue and defend the subject matter.

Chapter Three is an analysis of the ministry. This section is composed of the Biblical, historical, and theological foundations of the model of ministry. Further, this section demonstrates the passion, drive, and expertise of the writer. Finally, Chapter Three contains the Old and New Testament Scriptures, supported with the exegesis of the text.

Chapter Four presents the methodology of the model. This section discusses the research methodology and design for the project, and includes a discussion of the collection of data, as well as the validation of the outcomes.

Chapter Five provides specific information concerning the field experience. This chapter gives a thorough description of the project implemented, and the process. It also includes the reflections of the volunteers, quantitative methods and triangulation of the data.

Chapter Six contains the reflection, summary, and conclusions based on the model. Any summation of the project and conclusions drawn from the data are described in this chapter. Chapter six also reveals the success or outcome of the project

implementation. And finally, the author's own theological reflection is included in chapter six.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Spiritual Autobiography

This project is entitled "Empowering Women Who Are Confined In a Traditional Church Setting to Confront Bias" and it is based on my own experiences as an African American Christian woman who has faced oppressive bias in the church throughout my spiritual journey. I have come to realize that many of these biases were oppressive, and their influence nearly made me miss developing a relationship with God.

But, as I got a little older, and as the preacher continued to preach about the bondages of hell, it felt as if the chains became heavy on those little shoulders of mine. During the same time, my mother, who was strict and religious, talked to me only when it was about the Bible and the consequences of breaking the commandments. As a result of these influences, I felt stifled, constricted and oppressed. I could not verbalize the reasons for my sadness at that time; I just felt that God was a bully. I wondered why I should die in order to live, and why I was expected to live a life of rules and regulations. Surprisingly however, that mentality, and the portrait of God that was provided for me, did not turn me away from God, because reverential fear made me do my best to live up to the commandments. But I resented God at that time, because the guilt that I felt was overwhelming.

In the church where I was raised, the preacher stood up every Sunday and preached from a text in the Bible. He then related that Bible passage to real life circumstances to encourage the congregation, and added an occasional strong warning about hell. It was simplistic, but it was depressing. Every time I left the church, I felt judged, and as if my soul had been condemned.

In addition to Sunday church, there was what seemed like the occasional Saturday night service at my house. My mother would summon me to help with stringing or shelling the Sunday dinner vegetable. As I helped her break the ends off the string beans, or shell the butter beans, my mother would put the fear of God into my heart. The topic of her services typically concerned the Ten Commandments. First, there was sex, and she made it seem like sex was the worst thing in the world. Her message was clear: you better not do it until you get married, because God will not be pleased at all. I wondered, if it is so bad, then why did she do it? The only answer that my child's mind could come up with was that it must have been out of necessity to have children. Then came her message about no drinking; it was a sin toward the body. Her other topics included prohibitions against partying and cursing, and the list went on and on. If I did not heed this advice, the message was clear, I was bound for hell. And these teachings made me feel like God was up in heaven waiting for me to mess up, to send me to hell. Although I knew I was supposed to love Him for all the blessings he gave out, I felt incredibly burdened by all his rules and regulations. There was a pining in my soul to experience life without the shackles. So, God was real to me, but he was in another world, in another place, and his dealings with me were limited to how well I lived up to the law.

It was not until I suffered a broken heart as an adult that I remember crying out to God, "w*hy did you allow this to happen to me*?" And then I picked up my Bible and started to read. For the first time, it seemed that Jesus was speaking to me. I read the story about Jesus dying on the cross for my sins, and immediately my heart was pierced with the conviction of love. At that point, I looked at the loss of my lover as human nature, but the ultimate love was the love I felt towards Jesus' act of dying for me. I did not feel alone anymore, and I did not feel so broken either; I felt loved. It was just at the right time, and that day was the day that I fell head over heels in love with Jesus. That was in 1996, and it was the turning point in my life. From that point forward, my love for Jesus caused me to read and study the word more and more. And I found that the hard, judgmental God of my youth did not coincide with what I was beginning to feel on the inside. I felt burdened and trapped by the way religion had been taught to me, but I desired to be free. My desire for freedom was actually the need to experience God for myself, without the all the rules, or the terror of the threat of hell hanging over my head. But I continued to feel as though I was always watched, and the fear of risking my soul was too heavy a price to pay for a moment of temporary happiness.

Eventually I figured out that I needed to do some soul searching; I had to go back and think about what I was taught, what I internalized, and why. I realized that I had never seen a female preacher while growing up, and I could not even identify whether I believed in women being preachers. I did not ever recall the women speaking in church or taking a leadership role, unless it was reading the announcements or jumping with the Holy Ghost.

Then there was the Bible, and the context in which it was taught. I assumed that it meant exactly what it said. And for me, it painted a bleak picture because no liar, thief, murderer or adulterer was ever entering into the kingdom of God. With laws like that, I believed there was no room for error, no chance for redemption, nor was there much fun in religion. What I had learned about religion from Jesus dying on the cross was that He died so that we could have a chance for eternal life, but we had to work very hard to get there. I had no knowledge or understanding of His grace and His love. Therefore, the contradiction between how much He loved me and what He required of me on earth to get to heaven was unsettling in my spirit. The most unsettling detail that I realized was how I felt a sense of *un-belonging* as a girl, and then later as a woman in the church. The women, it seemed, were always portrayed as responsible for the demise of a man, or as the source of evil that beguiled her counterparts. The real terror that I felt was based on having been taught that one woman, Eve, was responsible for the demise of all our souls; *one woman*. I was left asking myself, where was the good in women, and were we only mere servants in the church?

However, even in the midst of these contradictions, some very traumatic experiences in my life proved to me that God is merciful and real. I saw my daddy, who was an alcoholic, stop drinking immediately following a touch from God, and never take another drink in his life. The touch from God for him was his call to ministry. He accepted that call, and is my pastor. In addition, I saw my grandfather go blind, and take the transition from sight to darkness with ease. He was an avid believer in Christ who died at the age of ninety nine with a smile on his face. He brought the words of God to life, he took the sting out of death, and his faithful smile was etched in my soul forever.

I felt the need to be a vessel for God because I had felt so disempowered and oppressed by the circumstances in my life that I never wanted any other person to experience the same weight of those chains of oppression on their life that I felt on mine. My feelings of oppression stemmed from feeling that there was no liberty in Jesus. My traditional church experience instilled in me a feeling that women were not only the down fall of men, but also the very reason that women suffered. In fact, I felt that, based on the downfall of Eve, women were to blame for anything remotely close to sin and suffering. In this traditional church setting, grace was not taught, and therefore I missed the fact that it was not by my righteousness or my works that I would be saved, but by His righteousness and His grace; that very important detail made me a slave to the law, and I felt defeated and condemned by God.

I have heard the soft whisper of Jesus when fear crept in my heart. Thinking that I was going to die from disease, I heard in my spirit, "*the devil is a liar*". And when I thought my daughter was going to die from sickness, I heard what I perceived and believed was the voice of God. He said, "*this thing is not until death*". These experiences were "outside the box" in that they did not happen like the preacher said they would. I was not in church filled with the Holy Ghost, I was not living a picture perfect life, and yet he endowed me with the wonders of his love. God just showed up!

As I look back over the years of my life, I consider that the word of God being instilled in me as early as the age of nine was the reason for my foundation of faith, and the reason I am alive today. I am thankful for God keeping watch over my life. I regret, however, the tradition of religion that bound me. Religion had such an impact on my life

that it almost made me miss out on developing a relationship with God. It had me so bound and oppressed that I did not enjoy my life, for fear of losing my soul. I tremble to think that if it had not been for His love, I would have not received my call.

In 2003, however, I did receive the call from God on my life. In the wee hours of the night, the Lord awakened me to the scripture of Ephesians 4:1

> Therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" and verses 11 through 12, "and he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Tears streamed from my eyes as I knew that the Lord had finally gotten me to see that He indeed was calling me to minister the word of God. In November 2004, I accepted my calling to the ministry, and in 2007, I enrolled in the Samuel DeWitt School of Theology at Virginia Union University. Over the course of the next three years, I kept my head to the plow, studying the word of God, and growing. The experience saved my life from a world of anguish, and by graduation, I had not only gained my self-worth as an individual in God, but I had also gained an identity as a *daughter* of God.

Over the course of many years, I have learned some valuable insights into what had been the imprisonment of my beliefs by the controlling patriarchs in the church who shaped the reading of the text and the picture I had of women in God's eyes. I, myself, believed that women were second hand citizens, only to be under the leadership of a man in order that God would hear our prayers.

I do not want other believers to feel like serving God is a burden, or deny God because of scripture taken out of context. I do not want women to be oppressed because of the bias in traditional church settings. God has so much more for us as believers of Jesus Christ, and one of those rewards is the joy and liberty of being sons and daughters of God. I want others to experience His grace, His fullness, His love, and liberty in Jesus.

My desire is to bring freedom and understanding to an otherwise mandated and ritualized script in the traditional church. The strongholds of religion made me feel the need to reach out to a dying world. Those strongholds are pushed upon individuals by others defining the nuances of who looks like God, and what is God, and what shape God comes in. I understand this because my experiences were shaped with a strong hand of religion, standards and law. But if we live by the law, we must die by the law, according to Galatians 2:16:

> Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

I am aware some will die in oppression; some will miss the completeness and realness of a living and present God because of religion. Some will not experience the trueness and wellness of life, and heaven on earth, because of law and tradition. This religion and tradition is passed on, based on interpretation of trained and skilled layman, called as preachers. I choose not to see another soul succumb to the ignorance of hierarchy. When there is freedom, there is equal opportunity for all people to do better, live better, and experience the limitless power and blessings that God has given to each one of us. My call to purpose is bringing freedom to an unjust forum within the

traditional church where it has been masked as God's perfect will to use patriarchal powers to limit the spiritual liberties of women. I am determined to bring an awareness of these injustices against women, while focusing on empowering women to confront bias that are found in a traditional church setting. This awareness will open up blinded eyes to see the authentic love of God. This project is only my attempt to help others discover their untapped and unlimited gifts, so this world can be a better place, one ministry, one person and one day at a time.

Once I discovered the truth concerning God's love for women as well, I wanted to help other women. The root of my desire came from my experience of being in an abusive marriage for years, and thinking that if I divorced this man, I would be granted no forgiveness, and would have no way of getting into heaven. This submissive attitude came as the result of the religious teaching I had received. So I stayed in the marriage, and nearly lost my life through what I thought of as suffering for the good of the Lord. I believed that God would deliver me in due season, if I took all that I could possibly take, which might include losing my sanity or my life. But it was when I began to know of the love of God for me as a woman, not as a second hand citizen or a seductress or a servant to man, that I found my liberty. I then began to discover my voice, and from that point, I began to pursue a calling to help others know the goodness of God and his love, not just for women, but everyone. I found that in Christ Jesus, there is liberty.

Being oppressed in any form results in suffering; it is like not being able to breathe. Being suppressed, withheld from living a life of liberty, or restrained from being afforded equal opportunities on any level results in having to deny yourself the truth of

being a rightful heir of God. It provides the opening for entertaining the possibility of there being discrimination in God, or unjust in his being. The pain of being a woman who felt disempowered by hierarchal powers motivated me to empower myself. The influence of hierarchal powers that affected my experience came through traditional church settings, beliefs, laws, and religion. When I began to feel empowered through having access to resources and tools, and I began to learn that I had the ability to read the Bible within a liberating context, I decided that I needed to help other women empower themselves, as well. Through this process of empowerment, I hope that women are made free to walk in their purpose, discover their gifts, and empower other women to also read the Bible as a liberating document.

Context of Ministry Project

Upon receiving my call to ministry, I began to understand that my purpose is to free women from the bondages inflicted upon them by patriarchal influences. It is my mandate to use a direct approach through teaching to assist women of Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church to reread the scriptures as liberating documents. Patriarchal control, in conjunction with the masculine focus of the bible, has caused women to feel disempowered when reading the scriptures within this context. I will, for lack of a better term, call the perceptions embraced by women through their own scriptural readings and experiences, *myths*. Personal myths, myths of rejection, powerlessness, guilt, and blame; the list goes on concerning the myths we bear, and have unknowingly embraced as women.

Edward P. Wimberley, author of *Recalling Our Own Stories,* expresses that there is the possibility of change. He states that using "reauthoring" provides a process that facilitates change.[1] This is the process of transforming the beliefs and convictions we have long held about our sense of self, ourselves in relation to others, and how we engage in the activity of caring. Wimberley believes that childhood experiences, unconscious processes, and cultural conventions are factors that contribute to myths, but we are not totally at mercy of these contributors."[2] Wimberley says that transformation is possible, and I agree. Specifically, transformation is possible through rereading our stories, then retelling our stories in order to rewrite our stories. The reauthoring technique is only one of the methods in the process of transformation and how we are to get there, however. Wimberley states that we need to envision ourselves where we want to be, then map and access our plan."[3] Through mapping and accessing, we begin to envisage obstacles to our growth and happiness. According to Wimberley, "The goal of reauthoring personal myths is to revise the story that runs through our personal behavior, to heal wounds and transform them into sources of strength in service to others."[4]

A result of these myths is the disempowerment that women feel within their own reading of the text as presented by the traditional church patriarchy, and the lack of

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[1]Edward P. Wimberley, *Recalling Our Own Stories* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 73.

[2]Wimberley, 74.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

support for the text as being a liberating document for them. The root causes of those myths have birthed oppressive practices that are inflicted upon women, and have resulted in our beliefs and the lives which we live. If we as the church would teach a healthy image of God, consistent with justice, equality and love, then the effects of that teaching will embody the fullness of God.

Being raised in a traditional church and in a very religious forum, I perceived that I could not obtain complete happiness on earth. As a woman, I believed that eternal bliss was on the other side, i.e., in heaven. The understanding I gained within my own context was that if my righteousness could not get me into heaven, then having a countenance of good intentions and sorrow might, and I was ridden with guilt. I felt guilty because it was a woman who caused the fall of men, and even the fall from God.

But it is tradition and religion that keeps us bound, and this is the reason for my context in ministry. My current context at Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church allows me to begin the reauthoring process, by rereading our stories in the light of liberation. As an associate minister, my responsibilities are to preach on second Sunday to the entire congregation, assist the choir director, and oversee the praise dance ministry. Other responsibilities are to partake as worship leader, and perform communion services and other duties as assigned by Pastor Caple.

Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church, a predominately black community, is composed of a ratio of 6 to 1, black to whites. Very few Hispanics or other cultural races make up the community. Relations are mostly agreeable amongst the black and the white

churches of the larger community, which are about five miles apart, in separate rural areas.

The population of Sussex County, where the church is located, as of the latest report in 2012 is 11, 972 people, with 40.9% being female and 57.6 % being Black, 40.6% White, and 0.4% being identified as other.[5] The racial demographic around the church is strictly African-American, and the size of the church is about one hundred members; on a good Sunday, perhaps fifty people attend service. The church is located in the woods, and to reach it, one passes only a few houses on the way. The surrounding area is mostly tree land and farm land that stretches as far as the eye can see. The second Sunday of each month is when I preach the majority of the time, and it is youth Sunday, the Sunday when the most people attend service. The younger members bring diverse new ideas, and I keep the younger children engaged. There is one weekly service on Sunday at 11:30 A.M., Sunday school is held weekly at 10:10 A.M., and Bible study is held on Wednesday nights at 7:30 P.M.

I believe that I am accountable to tell the world that oppression comes from a distorted representation of God's Kingdom, and the freedom of God's kingdom comes with sharing in the liberation struggle. Oppression creates suffering. My heart's desire is to teach the body of believers about a tangible Jesus (not vague or elusive) but one who is present in real life situations, and a God who can free us from oppression, and who is the voice when there is no other source but God. I have chosen this project because I believe in justice and heavenly blessings here on earth.

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[5]http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/51/51183.html (accessed January 6, 2014).

As stated by James H. Cone, "What the church offers now is oppressed hope and does not allow the possibility of changing our earthly condition but a longing for the next life."[6] On the other hand, according to Anne M. Clifford, "To enter the kingdom is to enter the state of salvation, the condition of blessedness."[7]

And according to the writings of Stephanie Y. Mitchem, "Patriarchy, with its dominance and submission dynamics, is a barrier to an interdependence and mutuality that can guide the vision of a holistic and egalitarian society in multiple ways. It limits the capacity of society to call forth the gifts of women."[8]

Currently, I envision my connection between my spiritual journey and the Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church as my ministry to the people who are oppressed by religion. In addition, through my spiritual journey, my experience with the traditions of Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church has resulted in a need for me to pray for restoration. I pray for the dry places in the church body, and seek to provide refuge for a dying congregation trying to survive the changes of an economically challenging pace of life. I realize that I have an anointing to preach, and to teach those who suffer the same destructive chains of oppression that I have experienced. In reflecting on my spiritual journey, there is a connection between my hunger to seek the face of God for my liberation, and helping

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[6]James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 127.

[7]Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 21.

[8]Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 99.

others gain their spiritual liberation. I believe that the driving force in my deliverance from oppression has been establishing my self-worth as God sees me.

As associate minister of Greater Hickory Baptist Church, I continue to be led and inspired by the Holy Spirit. The effects of religion caused me to be oppressed and stuck in a place of wilderness for 18 years, in a marriage where neither my husband nor I understood liberty in Jesus. For the sake of love, I accepted the experience as suffering for the good of the Lord, but in retrospect, it turned out to be suffering for the good of the law, and oppression. My many experiences of knowing God in a place of many storms have left me not just a preacher, but also a teacher. As James H. Harris describes in *Preaching Liberation*, "Black art is black people creating values based on their own experience and affirming the willingness to invent new definitions and life-styles commensurate with our struggle to be free."[9]

It is difficult for me to put into global context how to change the effects of religion brought on by tradition. How do you translate the experience of spirituality and relationship with Jesus Christ into individual salvation and church ethos? It is therefore my quest to preach the word to the best of my ability by referencing original text and exegesis, and determining in context what is the word of the Lord. I will use the context of the church to address women feeling disempowered through the reading of their own text. Women feel disempowered to pursue their spiritual gifts, or pursue the purpose they

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[9]James H. Harris, *Preaching Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press., 1995), 8-9.

believe they are called to in the church, as well as in their ability to deal with the patriarchal forces that form bias that these women are subjected to.

I will do a two week study involving rereading the Bible, to bring consciousness to the Bible as a liberating document. We will go on to evaluate the question of "who are we now?" This will bring us to answer other questions such as, "what do we need now as women?" Evaluating my past history, my experiences, and my upbringing brings me to the self-awareness that I have a responsibility to inform the world of the liberation of Jesus Christ. "Before anyone can change one's situation one needs to be free to do so, liberation is a precondition of transformation. Transformation begins with a new understanding of consciousness which requires a mental and spiritual transformation. Romans 12: 2 "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." Liberation is simply an awareness that her thoughts and actions are not simply a reflection of the thoughts of others, but the ability for you to think and do for yourself. It is shaped by a deep sense of moral responsibility and biblical reflection. The ultimate goal of liberation is to transform—to bring about change in one's condition by confronting the causes of the condition. It requires a collective transformation of individuals."[10]

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[10]James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 26.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY

> What [man] here is so enamored of [his] own oppression that [he] cannot see [his] heel print upon [a] woman's face? What terms of oppression have become precious and necessary to [him] as a ticket into the fold of righteousness, away from the cold winds of self scrutiny?
>
> —Emilie M. Townes, *A Troubling In My Soul*

Patriarchy has been an oppressive force enabling bias to hinder women in the traditional church setting. In a conservative and unsuspicious manner preachers have influenced church folk. Influenced church folk to believe on the side of persuasion what "thus says the Lord." Coincidentally, church folk is made up majority of women. With an authoritative sense of right standing in God hierarchy has been justified as the acceptable will of God. The problem with hierarchy is it does not provide equal opportunity where women are concerned in a traditional church setting. If it did provide the authoritative voice of God then why do we not see a kitchen full of men preparing for the church anniversary? Or why do we not see a pulpit full of women overseeing a pew full of men deacons submitting to the authoritative voice of God and His statures. The reason is that interpretation of certain text has traditionally been taught that man is the head of women. However, there is nowhere in the Bible where God states man is the head of woman.

In order for women to be liberated scripture must be interpreted within context. Therefore, the importance of hermeneutics centers on correctly interpreting scripture.

One of the purposes for Biblical Hermeneutics is for cultural totality, shared values and meaning throughout the world.[1]

> We must practice a thorough hermeneutic of suspicion and investigate the conditions and circumstances of our daily life. The discoveries of that investigation free us from the misconceptions that promote injustice and social, political, and theo-ethical control. We must sharpen our critical tools, which are necessary to examine the oppressive conditions under which a woman or any oppressed individual or group must live.[2]

On the contrary of the feminist and the protest of patriarchal control there are still those who speak boldly against the progression for women. They use scripture passages to try and support their position that inhibits women from taking active leadership roles in their churches. Pastor Steven L. Anderson wants women silent in church—not even an "Amen". The pastor of Faithful Word Baptist Church, Tempe, Arizona established his position using 1 Timothy 2:11 and 1 Corinthians 14:

> First of all, it is not for a woman to be doing the preaching. And second of all, it is not for women to be speaking. Even if they were to have a question, they're not to ask that question in the church, number one and number two, even if they wanted to ask questions of their husbands, they should wait until they get home.[3]

A second contradiction is noted by Cathy Young in her article, *Yes, Patriarchy is Dead; The Feminist Prove It* states:

> In its present form—as a secular cult that should call itself the Sisters of Perpetual Grievance—feminism is far more a part of the problem than part of the solution. It clings to women's wrongs and turns women's rights into

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[1]R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Post—Colonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2002), 235.

[2]Emilie M. Townes, ed., *A Troubling in My Soul, Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 88.

[3]"Pastor Steven L. Anderson Wants Women Silent in Church—Not Even an 'Amen'," accessed March 26, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/26/steven-anderson-women-silence_n_5035528.html.

> narcissistic entitlement. It is far too easily prone to bashing men while painting women as insultingly helpless and downplaying their human capacity for cruelty. (The notion that abuse and dominance would not exist without patriarchy is not only naively utopian but utterly sexist.) It is also deeply irrelevant to most women, only 5 percent of whom consider them 'strong feminists,' even though 82 percent believe that men and women should be social, political, and economic equals.
> Of course the patriarchy—at least here in the West—is dead. Whether feminism deserves to survive it is up to the feminists.[4]

And Camille Pagilia in her article, "*It's A Man's World, and It Always Will Be*", states:

> What is troubling in too many books and articles by feminist journalists in the U.S. is, despite their putative leftism, an implicit privileging of bourgeois values and culture. The particular focused, clerical and managerial skills of the upper-middle-class elite are presented as the highest desideratum, the ultimate evolutionary point of humanity.[5]

> The effective challenges to comfort bias that confine women in a traditional church setting is an attempt to rid the church of its oppressive tendencies. It is the hope for survival and development of authentic spiritual consciousness over and against the manipulative and exploitative power of hierarchy. It is the hope which means self-actualization of creative human potential in the struggle against oppression.[6]

Emilie Townes offers the following thought:

> Failure to study and personally integrate the social justice teachings of the church, and the unconscious and conscious inaction on the part of those who possess institutional power and those who are victims of the current structural arrangements, has blocked change and perpetuated the socially sinful status quo.

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[4]Cathy Young, "Yes Patriarchy is Dead; the Feminist Prove It," accessed December 16, 2013, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2013/09/23/yes_patriarchy_is_dead_the_feminists_prove_it_120031.html.

[5]Camille Pagilia, "It's a Man's World, and It Always Will Be," accessed December 16, 2013, http://ideas.time.com/2013/12/16/its-a-mans-world-and-it-always-will-be/.

[6]Richard Friedman, *Who Wrote The Bible?* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishing, 1987), 70.

> Social injustice, social sins and the perpetuation of socially unjust structures are made possible by the unspoken cooperation of the oppressor and the oppressed.[7]

The moral theologian Hormis Mynatty defines social sin as "the conscious and willful participation of a group or a society in cooperating with sinful social structures and thus maintaining and perpetuating them and failing to do anything to change them when it is possible."[8]

Confronting machismo must come first. This means admitting that women have been enslaved and that enslavement has had devastating consequences for the world. The problem with patriarchal practices in the U.S. churches is that it has contributed to a rise in new types of wars. These wars have come into existence because of the refusal to address the hierarchical influences in our churches and secular world. These wars include domestic violence and human trafficking. The negative exploitation of women must be stopped so that the negative self images held by many women can be changed.

What Is The State Of The Church?

Almost three thousand years ago the bible was translated. People take it figuratively, literally, or symbolically. It is quoted, misquoted, translated and mistranslated. Scholars spend time studying and teaching it. Preachers, ministers, priests, and rabbis preach it. People study, love it, read it, admire it, distain it, write about it, argue it, live and die for it. But we do not know who wrote it.[9] For certain this is the

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[7]Townes, 56.

[8]Ibid., 57.

[9]Friedman, 35.

discourse amongst our people. The trouble with texts, they can be assigned meanings to prove or legitimize any cause, theory or perspective.[10]

Grant R. Osborne writes in his book, *Hermeneutical Spiral,* that all of us read the text with undue criticism, skepticism, but also with our own background and natural tendencies. These pre-assumptions makes it hard to be objective but more dangerous not to. The problem of interpretation therefore becomes insurmountable. When aligning the current observations with two thousand years of development from biblical times to current it is exceedingly difficult. The act of interpretation is supposed to be done within a cultural and theological framework. This is not always an achievable task whether intentional or unintentional is suggestive only.[11]

Hans Frei states the result is the reader becomes the creator of meaning other than the text. The act of coming to understanding has become an individual self-discovery more than the process of decoding the text of meaning. The author is entirely removed from the text and the discovery of meaning. It is absolute that the reader/interpreter must complete the meaning of the text. The author at some point must become autonomous from the text. Otherwise, there is the constant intrusion of the interpreter. A further result is polyvalence or plurisignification (multiple meanings). In reverence to the model at hand the ability to read the text and move the validity of the interpreter's claim can be detrimental to the growth of women when used in a patriarchal setting.[12]

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[10]Sugirtharajah, 122.

[11]Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral. A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 467.

[12]Osborne, 467.

The author Townes uses the influences of other writers in her work and says O'Connor and Dreary state that the ideology of oppression is a thought for discourse. The authors discovered that although ordinarily attributed to men and specifically to clerics, women had an active role in fostering their own oppression, consciously or unconsciously. The authors suggest that it would require a great effort to bring patriarchal conditioning to women's sub consciousness. Basically, it would require a process that translates into the effacement of years of psychological programming.[13]

The sin of oppression has stifled the spiritual and ministerial development of women who feel called to active discipleship for too long. A skilled, prayerful and spirit-filled leadership, committed to preach and realize the mission of Jesus Christ of establishing right relationships within the human community, and between the communities of God, can attune many members of the church to the power of God within them. When the presence of God is awakened to his presence within them then us as a church will be able to be responsive to the needs of the oppressed. An oppressive, spiritually dead, egocentric leadership can be an obstacle to church members responding to God's call to participate in the preparation of the coming of God's Kingdom. This struggle to overcome oppression and bias that that dehumanize women requires the collaborative participation of both male and female. Pastoral and congregations must struggle to overcome their personal and cultural-racial patterns of domination or submission and feelings of innate superiority and inferiority. Change is fearful, time-consuming and painful for those fearful of the change. But in a moral begins to partially see and experience the hope, joy, and love of living in the patterns of right relationships

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[13]Townes, 197.

and characteristic of God's kingdom. In this struggle we will come together in prayer to recall that Jesus was crucified because his lifestyle and preaching pronounced a change in social, political, and religious institutions of his day.[14]

"What's at stake…is whether American Christians are willing to dismantle a long-held justification for violence against women, not just in our country, but around the world."[15] For the patriarchal influences in the church perpetuates to greater exploitation outside the church.

In the book *The Second Sex*, Mary Daly states:

> When it comes to justice the church has failed to rise to the challenge. The coercive strength of sexual prejudice was described as demonic. Both sexes have been affected in which prejudice has been fostered. The human potential of the subject group is restricted, but the superordinate group has become warped in the process.[16]

Daly continues with, "There has been failure to see that the fundamental problem of the right relation between men and women is basically one, whether we are talking about education, professional opportunity, political life, home life or ecclesiastical affairs."[17]

> As long as men continue to define themselves by using the masters' tools of dominance and subordination, whether by commission or omission, as their measure of manhood, there will be no justice in the church. Until there is a new understanding and regard for the full personhood of all women with their gifts and

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[14]Townes, 45.

[15]Suzanne Ross, "Sex and Violence Go To Church," accessed February 7, 2014, http://sojo.net/blogs/2014/02/07/sex-and-violence-go-church-breaking-habits-machismo.

[16]Mary Daly, *The Church and The Second Sex* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985), 197.

[17]Ibid., 213.

> talents in the church, we will not bear the yoke of Jesus. Instead, we will continue to bear the yoke of preserving patriarchal privilege.[18]
>
> "Must women bear the yoke alone, and all the men go free?"[19]
>
> Salvation is offered to all people. Jesus takes the side of the most in need, physically and spiritually. Jesus challenges the church to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the defenseless. His mandate also included a compassionate vision that enables the church to see things from the side of the poor and powerless. Jesus summons the church to address lifestyle, policies and social institutions in terms of their impact to the poor and be an instrument in assisting people to experience the liberating power of God in their lives. This is that they may respond to the gospel in freedom and dignity. In addition it calls for an emptying of oneself, both individually and corporately, that allows the church to experience the power of God in the midst of poverty and powerlessness.[20]

What Is The State Of The Art In Ministry Model?

I have used both contemporary and historical authors to summarize my perspective on this topic. In her work *Breaking the Habits of Machismo*, Michelle Gonzalez writes that the church fathers often implied that women must negate their womanhood in order to reflect their creation in God's image. Women images are reflected as distorted and inherently deficient. Aquinas described women as defective and misbegotten and solely for the purpose of procreation. The thought was women were redeemed despite their femaleness. These same misinterpretations from the Christian tradition have led to patriarchal church teachings that have led to the patriarchal image of God. Too often Jesus' maleness becomes normative within a patriarchal theology.

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[18]Townes, 46.

[19]Ibid., 95.

[20]Ibid, 109.

Making an idol out of Jesus' maleness puts limitations on how women reflect on the image of God. Our theology must draw all of creation equally toward the Creator.[21]

Mary Daly offers the following solution by stating that what is needed is a more prophetic vision of the church as a movement in the world. In which the primary concern should be for the betterment of human condition, and cooperation as a whole to achieve this goal. The personal interest and institutional prestige would have to be put aside to allow women to come into their own identities amongst the people of God. In order for this theological atmosphere to be obtained, it will be necessary to develop an understanding of the Incarnation. This understanding causes to go beyond the regressive, sin-obsessed view of human life. It has to bring about social justice and personal commitment. Another example to model would be to create an effort to develop a theological anthropology which will study the dynamics of human personality and social relationship from a radically evolutionary point of view. A theology for both man and woman has to be developed that will reject any conception of 'the common good' which would diminish the potential of one sex for the sake of the other. There is a need for breath of vision.[22]

Author Townes believes we need to acknowledge our human ability to effect change in individual lives and in the lives of others. There has to be a reactive move from the position of suffering to that of transforming power. As women the affirmation has to be confirmed to refuse to accept the facts handed down to us. Challenge the new

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[21]Suzanne Ross, "Sex and Violence Go To Church," accessed February 7, 2014, http://sojo.net/blogs/2014/02/07/sex-and-violence-go-church-breaking-habits-machismo.

[22]Daly, 184.

dimensions of awareness of God's presence within humanity and liberation. Maintain the awareness that every strategy to defeat sin may not be successful but it is a sign to reevaluate and try different strategies to bring justice. Christian mission must be done in context of authority and obedience. Power as cooperation and mutual respect help us to develop our capacities for nurturance and empathy as well as interconnectedness. The concept of authority arises out of this understanding of power as shared authority. Authority then is a contextualized commitment based on accountability to God through Jesus Christ. Women in ministry must be aware of and articulate an analysis of female inequality that is cogent to the repressiveness of tradition.[23]

Townes asks the reader to consider the ramifications of taking responsibility for our stations: One major factor to consider is responsibility. Responsibility means participating in the freedom process. The Bible, tradition and experiences of patriarchal influences are tools used for repression and manipulation by authority figures. The individuals or women is told what to think and does no independent interpretation. [24]

Daly uses the thoughts of other feminist writers including Simone de Beauvoir and Gertrud von le Fort to indicate the benefit for changing old stereotypes:

> That women have a consciousness of the problem who have the required creative vigor and independence, have the responsibility of changing the image of woman by raising up their own image, giving an example to others and especially to the younger women. The point is to set up another stereotype, replacing the old and to manifest the unreliability of all stereotypes by showing the immense variety in the potential of women. This will provide encouragement for favorable conditions to help remove impediments that foster oppression in women.[25]

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[23]Townes, 27.

[24]Townes, 38.

[25]Daly, 177.

Other possibilities for confronting bias that affect women include the following thoughts of Emilie Townes:

> •More women need to take a personal desire to become more accountable for their own salvation.
>
> •Recognize the principle of the issue; no woman should be disqualified from any church office on the basis of sex.
>
> •Confer it is the church responsibility to reform its own doctrine and practices. The old oppressive form of relationships is to be transcended. Bring about a right relation between men and women by demonstration through reform of itself, in its theology and in its life.
>
> •Create new situations which foster dialogue and cooperation. Cause for transformation.
>
> •Be active in the process of liberation, personal and institutional changes and exploring alternative goals and plans (that they must be consistent with our integrity (that they open up alternatives. What is done should demonstrate what is valued and who we are. This requires bringing conflicting values out into the open.
>
> •Seek Justice, not only looking outward but also inward. The yoke we are called to bear is seeking justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God. It is repenting.
>
> •A common goal to transform the socioeconomic and sociopolitical structure of the United States society. A response out of faith in God's justice because we know that it is through and without our socio-historic community that we are judged, redeemed, and saved by God's justice, thus being called as moral agents to respond to institutionalized moral evils because the universal context of God's justice commands us. Awake, arise, and act![26]

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[26]Townes, 99.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Biblical Foundations

The focus of the study is on deconstructing hermeneutics that foster oppression in women. According to various scholars, hermeneutics is the science of the interpretation of the Bible. Noted scholars of hermeneutics such as Bernard W. Anderson, define hermeneutics as "modes of Bible interpretations."[1] Another scholar, James A. Sanders defines the term as "interpretative lenses through which one reads the Bible."[2]

Historically, some scholars suggest that biblical text has been used to oppress women; patriarchal interpretation of the scriptures has negatively influenced the ability of women to be their authentic selves. Additionally, scholars state that oppression is the exercise of authority or power in a cruel or unjust manner.

The hypothesis of the research is that if women are taught to read the bible as a literary document, they will live liberated lives, and assist in the edification of the Body of Christ. The research will provide insight for women which may foster freedom from spiritual oppression, through enlightenment, based on the scriptures. Paradigms such as

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[1]Biblical Archaeology Society Staff, "A Bible Hermeneutics Definition, How Bible Interpretations, or Hermeneutics of the Bible, Affect the Way We Read the Scriptures," accessed July 22, 2011, http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-interpretation/a-bible-hermeneutics-definition.

[2]Ibid.

methods for investigation and determination of the meaning of manuscript will be used as well as hermeneutical approaches which focus on the complete detail of the writings. Hermeneutics, applied correctly, is used to reveal meaning and authority of the body of scriptures, without patriarchal influence, to define literal understanding. Cultural and historical back ground, and the literary genre, as well as grammatical and syntactical aspects are taken into account to determine the interpretation of the text.

Specifically, the study will evaluate the actions of a patriarch, King A-has-u-er'rus, who degraded a woman, Queen Vashti, within the biblical writ. The actions of King A-has-u-er'rus set a precedent for other male leaders, and provided a platform for the incorrect interpretation of biblical teachings.

The Old Testament text in the Book of Esther tells the story of Queen Vashti, and provides an example of male dominance and the injustice of male leadership. The Global Bible Commentary states, "The book of Esther is a book of gender politics about women living under imperial orders as much as a national tale about a people surviving the threat of ethnic destruction. In effect, any female in the book is limited to the role ascribed to her in the men's world with its nationalistic agenda."[3]

This first chapter of Esther details the authority of King A-has-u-er'rus over Queen Vashti, when she refused to yield to his request:

> On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Me-hu'man, Biz'tha, Har-bo'na, Big'tha, and A-bag'tha, Ze'thar, and Car'cas the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of A-has-u-er'rus

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[3]Biblical Archaeology Society Staff, "A Bible Hermeneutics Definition, How Bible Interpretations, or Hermeneutics of the Bible, Affect the Way We Read the Scriptures," accessed July 22, 2011, http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-interpretation/a-bible-hermeneutics-definition.

> the king, to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princess her beauty: for she was fair to look on. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlain therefore were the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king A-has-u-e'rus; Vashti and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she.[4]

Authoritative measures were taken by King A-has-u-er'rus and his eunuchs to restrict the rights of Queen Vashti and the women of Persia. Because of Queen Vashti's refusal to come before the king and his eunuchs, the king made a decree that affected all of the women of Persia. The decree degraded women by indicating that women were to give proper respect to their husbands, and that the patriarchy had the authority. The study of this patriarchal structure has resulted in reflection as to whether scriptures, taken out of context, have led to and fostered maltreatment in women.

> The increase of women and marginalized groups adding their opinions to the theological debate has increased criticism, these criticisms referencing the attack against the oppressive, hierarchical, dualistic, male-dominated context of religious tradition and theological discourse. To not be an antagonist as a women who reads scripture is to separate yourself from groups of intellectual partners who seek to represent the scope of human experience. Women are forced to examine and criticize the epistemological, cultural, and theological paradigms left by tradition.[5]

The actions taken by the king in these scriptures were acts of degradation towards Queen Vashti. Text such as the Book of Esther, as it describes the events surrounding Queen Vashti, has defined women's worth from the time of Eve to current day, but within the confinements of male oriented interpretation. This definition, however, is

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[4]Esther 1:10-12, 19.

[5]Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis; MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 118.

biased and limited; hence this perspective incorrectly diminishes a woman's worth. As a result of this and actions such as those of the king, throughout time, women have often been left with feelings of isolation and abandonment.

It is evident that the king's acts were degrading to women. This degradation has occurred for centuries, as described in the biblical writ, and dates back to the beginning with Eve. The behavior displayed by the king was a common practice during the biblical times, and although not acceptable in today's society, the actions were damaging and created a platform for today's degradation to women. Thus, religion and tradition have caused the beliefs of God to be overlooked, and the carnal emotions like those displayed by King A-has-u-er'rus were allowed to restrict the future of women. The perverseness of such violence within the scripture should increase our sensitivity as to the ways in which women's sexuality was demonized in that culture. The Biblical language is sexually humiliating, and was used to contemplate matters of justice, retribution and power.

The Book of Esther portrays how the reprehensible need to boost the male ego was often bolstered through continued degradation and deployable treatment of women. The celebration described was not solely focused on the king's rule over his territories, but it was also a description of strategic planning for the upcoming war. The king's motive was to acquire more wealth, territory and property, and Queen Vashti was included in the spoils. The king wanted to display her as his acquired property among his vastly gains. It was suggested that the summons made by the king was that the queen should appear naked before him and his male guests. Queen Vashti rejected the king's request, and the result established a platform for the interpretation of the male role as one of degradation and oppression of women. The ramifications of the queen's disobedience

of male authority resulted in her being dethroned. Also, as a result, the magnitude of the king's unjust behavior was exemplified towards all women. Young and beautiful virgins were vividly displayed within the context of sexual contests by which they might receive the royal crown. This process of degradation included each virgin being held in a harem for a year of cosmetic treatments. They would each then go in and have sexual intercourse; the virgins not chosen were confined to the harem for the rest of their lives in a dejected fashion and forgotten about.

The interpretation of verses 1-12, on the surface, may show women the consequences of not following the king's command, and perhaps provide the message of the extent to which women were to satisfy their men. To some degree, the message conveys that women's ability to be a helpmate is confined to being a sexual object. However, some modern day women believe that this misinterpretation of scripture glorifies oppression of women, and they view this as an injustice; this egregious method of thinking is neither healthy nor productive for the edification of God's kingdom, nor the proper rule over women by His sons.

> All of this only underscores the fact that reading is not the passive, private, neutral experience that we have previously believed. To read is to be prepared in many respects to fight defensively. It is to be prepared to resist, to avoid, to maneuver around some of the counterproductive impulses within the text. In short, reading does not mean simply surrendering oneself totally to the literary strategies and imaginative worlds of narrators. It also means at the very least that one must be conscious of the ways in which symbolic speech, for example, draws us into its designs and attempts to mold our beliefs and identity.[6]

Texts such as Genesis 3:16 and Esther 1:10-13 and 19 describe the influence which was unleashed when women went against, or were under the control of ungodly

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[6]Weems, 101.

counsel of men. Biblical accounts such as the raped princess Tamar (2 Samuel:13), or the concubine from Bethlehem (Judges 19: 25-30), who was gang-raped and chopped into pieces after being used by her rapists, show appalling examples of the degradation of women in biblical times, and that thinking lingers forth today. These stories do not tell what becomes of the persecutors, or their subsequent fate, so the insinuation is that the lives of women were merely of little value. Vengeance in those cases was sought out by the hands of loved ones, rather than the vengeance of an angry God who found the acts of malice toward his daughters shameful. In these passages, rhetoric and poetic language is used to influence, and to address the audience. Prophets exploited the descriptions of these events to cast the strongest moral terms possible.

Metaphors were used to illustrate Israel's subjective position in the relationship between God and Israel. The analogies used included, for example, God and Israel, husband and wife, slave and master. The prophets used these analogies as illustrations of the character that they perceived God to be. But God, to women, should not be presented as a brow beating, abusive, degrading and intimidating God. God is not an authoritarian figure who lashes out punishment, but one who laments and anguishes over the prospect of discipline of his children. His motivation for punishment is never arbitrary or heartless.

The prophetic description of Queen Vashti was used to remind women that the husband had dominion over the wife, and that his wife's sexuality, loyalty and her body belonged to him. Vashti's disobedience was compensated with her dethronement, and other women being punished at the hands of the male hierarchy. The story of Queen Vashti shows a patriarchal order in which women were sexually exploited, and it provides a good example of female oppression within a man's world and national agenda.

During this biblical time, women were collected by kings like jewelry; they were used for sexual pleasures and to serve the king. Women are depicted as objects in the text, emphasizing erroneous hermeneutics concerning the servitude of women.

The text also illustrates traditional rituals which provide no merit to the celebration or glory to God. This book is primarily secular, and both Vashti and Esther were examples used to justify the oppressive and unjust behavior of male authorities, who imagined themselves as the likeness of God. The women in the text were sacrificed as a whole for the country. As stated by Daniel Patte, "keeping the political status quo, the imperial order—or reversing it in the name of nationalistic survival—involves maintaining a patriarchal order in which women are reduced to objects."[7] When Vashti disobeyed the king and threatened the hierarchy of male authority, a decree was made to stiffen the consequences of her disobedience.

In fact, the consequence of Vashti's behavior mimics the effects of the behavior of Eve, in that the action of one woman became the basis of wrath or punishment for all women. The contempt of women carries a high price to pay, and it seems irreversible or continuous. Contemporary writer J. Lee Grady supports the concept of the irreversible curse by stating that, "yet for centuries the church has insisted that the curse of subjection and degradation placed on Eve must forever remain on all women, even though Christ redeemed them from the curse."[8]

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[7]Daniel Patte, *The Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 138-139.

[8]J. Lee Grady, *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2000), 28.

The Christian church is sometimes responsible for abuse of its members. Ronald M. Enroth, in his book, *Churches That Abuse,* described spiritually abusive practices of churches as manipulation of members and fostering dependency.[9] According to the book, strategies such as guilt, fear, and intimidation are used to control members who are spiritually engaged.[10] Enroth believes that, "leaders consciously foster an unhealthy form of dependency, spiritually and interpersonally, by focusing on themes of submission, loyalty, and obedience to those in authority. In all totalitarian environments, dependency is necessary for subjugation."[11]

Because of misinterpretation of scriptures, religious institutions have aided in the oppression of women. The abuse has been verbal, mental, emotional and physical in nature, and has manifested low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness amongst women. Ironically, instead of portraying women as honorable and accommodating, as God intended, patriarchs have used this misinterpretation to force women into servitude and objectivity. Men have also used this position to maintain control within the church, which has a large percentage of female participants.

The New Testament text, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, is a common text that is incorrectly interpreted and used to oppress women. It states, "Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law

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[9]Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 35.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

also says, if there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."

According to the explanation found in the New Living Translation Bible, these passages are to be read in conjunction with prior verses, in which Paul's main purpose was to maintain the peace. Paul had identified problems in the Corinthian church, and offered solutions in an attempt to maintain peace among women who were vocal and opinionated. Paul's intention was to teach the women, in their newly found faith as Christians, how to live like Christ in a corrupt society; it was not to silence women and hinder their spiritual liberty in Christ.

The website Godswordtowomen.org states that Paul's writing in the New Testament is an indication that women have been liberated from the law.[12] Further the site argued that Paul fought against the "religious zealots of his day who tried to impose the requirements of the Old Testament's written and oral laws on New Testament believers in Christ."[13] Additionally, Paul confirmed the validity of women in 1st Corinthians by indicating that they could pray and prophesy in the church.[14]

The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 that supports a male hierarchy is not founded in the writings of Paul. Instead, Paul was an advocate for women, and he supported their works in the ministry. A further example of Paul's support for women in

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[12]Dennis J. Preato, "Did Paul Really Say, 'Let the Women Keep Silent in the Churches'," accessed August 15, 2013, http://godswordtowomen.org/Preato2.htm.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

the ministry was found in his relationship with Phoebe and Aquila. Paul referred to Phoebe as sister, and servant within the church.[15]

In modern day society, it is difficult to believe that women were treated with such injustice and cruelty. This is the foundation from which the church has established the free will of women serving in the modern day congregations of America, yet Paul teaches that we are no longer under the law. Romans 3:19 -20 states, "Now we know that what things so ever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for the law is the knowledge of sin." This illustrates that the interpretation of the role of women in the church has been out of context. Further, it indicates that God does not want women to deny their gifts or be relegated to a place of submissive subjection. Paul's intent was to bring order to the church, as opposed to creating a platform for oppression of women.

To accept scripture in its partiality, without correct interpretation, is to hold women accountable for the inhumanity imposed upon women when in a patriarchal setting. Scripture teaches us that the gifts and callings of God are given to all members of the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:3-8; I Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:7-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11); none of these gifts or offices is the exclusive prerogative of men.

The church is the foundational structure which the family is built upon. The family is the most important component to building a strong economy, and it is the

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[15]Preato.

establishment from which all social structures originate. If the concept of family that the church supports is weak, then we can expect more of the same in relation to our economy, political affairs, and governing offices.

The Bible uses imagery as a tool of persuasion, and some of the concepts have been used to gain and maintain patriarchal social control. The imagery of masculinity as portrayed in the Bible has carried over into our social, economic, and political affairs and has set a precedent by which women are to be treated. This precedent has been unequal, and women subsequently suffer due to sexism. The church has become the pro-censor instead of the processor. The church should set the precedent for justice; the church should set the standard for liberty. This issue is described at length by Weems, who states, "Deliberate, emotional responses play upon cultural stereotypes, and ignore others. Metaphors do not have to give accurate portraits to be effective. Metaphors differ according to context and can change from generation to generation."[16] Weems believes that, "We have to consider what about the unstated assumptions? We have to take into account that metaphors deviate from reality and real life metaphorical language. Audiences accept, reject, esteem and forget metaphors in proportion to metaphors' ability or inability to square with a web of emotional social political, historical, institutional data."[17] Weems further states, "The audience(s) whose culture, languages, customs, worldviews and religion lay behind the biblical texts have long ceased to exist."[18] In this

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[16]Weems, 86.

[17]Ibid., 34.

[18]Ibid., 36.

discussion, we need to ask, how do we define our meanings within the larger cultural context? In addition, our conclusions are at best speculative, according to Weems, "because we have no explicit information about the assumptions that underlie Hebrew rhetoric."[19]

In order for the patriarchal stance to continue in the church, man must admit that oppressive behavior is not in the will of God. He must also admit that patriarchal order and hierarchy is not consistent with the word of God. Jesus is the bridegroom who gave himself for the church and as Christ loved the church so should men love their wives. Ephesians 5:29 is indicative of how men are supposed to nourish and cherish their wives. The implication that men are mandated to love their wives as themselves is evidence that a man should not hinder a woman's spiritual growth and that men should support women in ministry.

The intent of Paul to bring decency to the will of God was not to give men dominion over females, but to ensure a healthy church and eventually an effective missionary amongst the Gentiles. The new found religion among women threatened the larger culture, and subjection was not used for oppression but as a control mechanism to fulfill the law. Believing in Christ's love for the church is the basis for which man is supposed to love his wife, with an agape love enabling him to forgive, and not hate. Therefore, church should be a place where women are nourished and cherished and should be equally sought after to help bring to fruition the will of God. According to Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is

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[19]Weems, 37.

neither male nor female: for ye there are all one in Christ Jesus." Jesus came not to abolish the law, but to complete God's plan which could only be done through the blood of Jesus. Paul confirms that in Romans 3:8: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the lines of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." The Father bears witness of his love for them by freeing them from the bondage of the law. His grace has put them in right standing and reconciled them back to the Father.

According to Romans 8:16-17, "the spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Women are heirs of God and therefore need no provision in the law to seek man for authentication, approval or the freedom to serve God. Then how do we look at Paul and his writings and how they contribute to women and the Bible? The misinterpretation of Paul's writing has contributed to the mentality behind women being enslaved. Paul is a disciple not mandated to give commandments, but oral directives based upon his experience. The cultural references of the time that the text was written are a reflection of a time in which women were viewed as second class citizens.

Historically, women were used to please the man, in order to procreate. Her sexual quest with her mate is met with the greater punishment of laboring in child birth as a result of her sin. How then can women be free with such burdens upon their shoulders? Are women to find love and solace in God? How can women find freedom with the misinterpretation of the scriptures being preached and taught within the church walls?

Instead of being labeled as the lesser gender, women need to be identified and embraced as a chosen vessel of God.

The claims of the researcher are supported by Elaine M. Flake, who states in *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women*

> Without question, violence is a reality in the lives of a disproportionate number of African American women, as is the resulting spiritual and emotional trauma. Research has found that African America women are particularly likely to use religious coping strategies and are more likely to seek help from a minister than from any other helping professional.[20]

American community found that religious beliefs caused some African American women to be less willing to disclose domestic violence. The beliefs that "God will take care of it" and "pray and the Lord will change him" were expressed as reasons for keeping violence a secret.[21] "Even worse, pulpits have been largely occupied with preachers who deny the existence of misogyny and the patriarchal underpinnings of violence against women. Some scholars have degraded women by espousing a "blame-the-victim" theology.[22] Additionally, male violence against women has been compounded by a sense of guilt and humiliation.[23]

Previously, women have been treated like "second hand citizens" to "the chosen of God" due partially to inaccurate exegesis of scripture. The change that is needed is to be inclusive, and embrace women in the description of God's chosen ones, as this inclusive language clearly identifies the purpose He has for all his people. In establishing

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[20]Elaine M. Flake, *God in Her Midst: Preaching Healing to Wounded Women,* ed. Kathryn V. Stanley (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2007), 3-4.

[21]Ibid., 3.

[22]Ibid., 4.

[23]Ibid.

God's solemn love for women, the researcher hopes to instill such a spiritual freedom that it will decrease the rates of domestic violence, suicides, suicide attempts, teenage promiscuity, sex trafficking, and teenage pregnancy. This change will result because the value of women will become a phenomenon that will cause others to stand up and participate in freeing women from grave injustices and incorrect biblical interpretation. The researcher has a grave concern for the station of women throughout generations and far back in history. Describing women through false lenses of religion has resulted in false descriptions of women. It is time that women who have come into contact with spirituality abort the tools of misguided religion, and look to God like a mirror that defines His greatness, and reflects the greatness of women.

Deconstructing a patriarchal hermeneutic will empower women and minimize the fostering of their oppression. Women need to realize how they think about oppression, in order to empower themselves and reduce the effects of oppression.

In Patricia Hill Collins' book, *Black Feminist Thought,* Lorde and Bambaras raise the thought, "Although most individuals have little difficulty identifying their own victimization within some major system of oppression—whether it be by race, social class, religion, physical ability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age or gender—they typically fail to see how their thoughts and actions uphold someone else's subordination."[24]

God made both male and female in his image and therefore, it is in the likeness of God that women have a right to serve Him in Spirit and in truth. Deconstructing

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[24]Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment,* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 221.

hermeneutics that promote oppression in women must address the incorrect interpretations that the church has allowed to pass off as behavior acceptable to God, and, in doing so, will empower women to express themselves freely in God. Expressions that result may lead to intimacy, and to loving one's self freely with willful minds and acceptable behaviors. Oppression and its burden can be broken through gaining knowledge of the difference between who God is to women, as opposed to what man says He is to women.

Romans 10:14, states, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" This is the task that is presented in this modern time; to deconstruct the oppression of women in ministry as demonstrated in the application of hermeneutics.[25]

Historical

Issues of interpretation have been prevalent since the beginnings of Christianity. "Its earliest of traditions go back to those of postexilic Judaism, which themselves were derived to a very large extent from interpretations of a body of texts. Christianity professes that God's self- revelations is to be known through the words contained in a body of writings: the Scriptures.[26] Scriptures found in the Bible are used for a variety of reasons, some of which include spiritual enlightenment, academic exercise, political

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[25]Mary Genhart and Fabian Udoh, *The Christianity Reader* (Chicago, IL: The University Chicago Press, 2007), 5.

[26]Ibid.

power, and support of denominational doctrine. Ultimately the scriptures are believed to lead to salvation, which leads to heaven.

Brilliant people believe the Bible to be true. It is the world's best-selling book. The Bible has the ability, based on how it is interpreted, to change lives. A more compelling trait of the Bible is that Biblical faith is based on historical events. The interpretation of the text, however, has become a common debate as to the claim, "thus says the Lord." Whose interpretation is correct? Does interpretation offer a place of solace for the female or the continuous plight of oppression?

Mary Gerhart and Fabian E. Udoh, of the *Christianity Reader*, state:

> What shall we say when we come to the Gospels? Does not an inner meaning, the Lord's meaning, also lie hidden there that is revealed only by that grace he said, But we have the mind of Christ—that we may understand the gifts bestowed upon us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit?[27]

"Thus, just as a human being is said to be made up of body, soul and spirit, so also is sacred scripture, which has been granted by God's gracious dispensation for man's salvation."[28]

The Christian faith was rooted in the person of Jesus Christ, who is love. 1 John 4:8, states, "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." The New Interpreter's Bible further suggests that women suffer rejection and maltreatment in the church at the hands of priests or pastors, and male leadership.[29] Additionally, the Bible

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[27]Genhart and Udoh, 5

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

states that traditions have formulated patriarchal theologies that cause women to be labeled as matrimonial property and have made women totally dependent on men for validation inside the church.[30] The twenty-first century church continues to be a source of pain, and a place where women are devalued and undervalued. While women love God and continue to be committed to the church and church work, it has also been and continues to be, a place where they are categorically and perpetually wounded.[31]

J. Lee Grady, author of *10 Lies the Church Tells Women*, provides a more sustainable view on the history of oppression of women. During the New Testament era, women were viewed as property belonging to men. More specifically, the women belonged to their husbands and fathers and were considered less valuable than cattle.[32] The Apostle Paul attempted to alleviate the stigma attached to women by encouraging men to love their wives as themselves.[33] The Christian view of husband-wife relationships is one of equality and mutual respect, not domination, control and humiliation. Yet gender prejudice remained entrenched in the church in its earliest days.[34] The Middle Age era was consistent with the New Testament traditions, whereas men viewed women as inferior creatures who were expected to be ruled by their husbands.[35]

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[30]Flake, 56.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Grady, 184.

[33]Ephesians 5:28.

[34]Grady, 184.

[35]Ibid.

Often the ruling of women consisted of necessary beatings for discipline purposes.[36] Catholic clergy in medieval times endorsed wife-beating for the purpose of discipline, and this was the law in the thirteenth century."[37]

Men's treatment of women through the ages has been succinctly summed up by Professor R. Howard Bloch: "The ritual denunciation of women goes back to the Old Testament as and as far back as Ancient Greece and extends to the fifteenth century. Found in Roman tradition, it dominates ecclesiastical writing, letters, sermons, theological tracts, discussions and complications of canon law."[38]

During the 19th century, women were considered to be the invisible members of the human species. However, during this era, women expressed a discontentment in the United States, and they began to participate actively in women's liberation.[39] Some of the notable participants were Sarah Grimke and Antoinette Brown. Specifically, Sarah Grimke pointed out the unnoticeable patriarchal bias of biblical interpretation.[40] Antoinette Brown, a student of theology who studied at Oberlin College, examined the epistles of Paul with feminist questions, and challenged his views in the 1890's.[41]

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[36]Grady, 184.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Helena Wojtczak, "British Women's Emancipation Since the Renaissance: The History of Female Oppression," accessed October 23, 2013, http:www.historyofwomen.org/oppression.htm.

[39]Denise Ackerman, "Feminist Liberation Theology: A Contextual Option," accessed October 23, 2013, http://www.womenpriests.org/theology/ackermann.asp Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, 1988.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid.

Another peer who was a founder of women's liberation was Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton did not believe that the Bible was a book that should be forced from the perspective of men; she believed just the opposite. She perceived the Bible to be a neutral book that was not to be used against women for political gain. In fact, Elizabeth Cady Stanton believed that the Bible should not be used to bring political struggle and oppression to women. She saw the Bible as being badly misinterpreted and misunderstood, and being used for patriarchal gain. She further stressed that women's studies were needed to include what was left out, and she added in parts to complete women stories, and to add a complete view of the Bible.[42]

She was joined by a committee of twenty other women who wrote commentaries to expand on interpretations of the Bible.[43] These women laid out an interpretative framework of major passages that referred to women in the Bible. This expansive body of work inevitably became The Women's Bible.[44]

By the end of the 19th century, women had started to over populate churches. Nevertheless, they were still in the position of subordination, unable to express themselves within religious leadership. Patriarchal structure kept women in subordinate positions, and offered them little chance for leadership roles.

> The concept of hermeneutics has acquired at least two different but related meanings which are in use today. Firstly, in the older sense, Biblical hermeneutics may be understood as the theological principles of exegesis which is often

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[42]Ackerman.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid.

> virtually synonymous with 'principles of biblical interpretation' or methodology of Biblical exegesis. Secondly, the more recent development is to understand the term 'Biblical hermeneutics' as the broader philosophy and linguistic underpinnings of interpretation. The question is posed: 'How is understanding possible?' The rationale of this approach is that, while Scripture is 'more than just an ordinary text', it is in the first analysis 'text' which human beings try to understand; in this sense, the principles of understanding any text apply to the Bible as well (regardless of whatever other additional, specifically theological principles are considered).[45]

The Patristic Period, c.100—c.700

The status of women in the patristic age is a contentious issue within Christianity. It seems writers sought to restrict the influence of women as well as the life of the church. Church Fathers opposed to independent female ascetism due to the fact it would threaten to emancipate the women from the men. However, during the Patristic Age, throughout the east and the west, the early century churches did allow women to participate to a limited extent. They were allowed to ordain deaconess.[46]

All the same, the enhanced social status of belonging to the Church offered women a connection, and women quickly became a large part of the Christian following within the patriarchal society.

Historically, it has been widely believed that men are dominant when it comes to women.[47] Discrimination towards women has aided in reinforcing this myth. Sexism is

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[45]*Christian Biblical Hermeneutics*, accessed August 18, 2014, http://biblehistroy.wordpress.com/2012/01/25/christian-biblical-hermeneutics.

[46]Frances Nesbitt Oppel, "Women's History," accessed August 13, 2013, http://www.culturalview.com/books/women_in_history.pdf.

[47]Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 23.

just as bad a crime as other forms of discrimination, such as that based on the color of one's skin or a physical handicap. Yet, women are denied equal rights based on the physical attributes that cause women to be women. Essentially, women have historically been treated as less valuable than men, and have been forced to stay in a position of subordination, and this has typically been accepted as the social norm.[48]

An example of Biblical text that has fostered oppression would be the passage describing the woman caught in adultery, found in John 8:33-11. Traditionally, this scripture has not only been interpreted as the woman caught in adultery, but also it has been used to illustrate how Jesus emphasized the importance of forgiveness. The passage highlights the compassion Jesus showed to the woman, as well as the part of human nature that includes the tendency to judge others. Jesus took a stand against patriarchal behavior, and bold directives that would punish women for their behavior, separate them from society, or make women feel inferior to men. Also noteworthy in reviewing this passage is that the woman was brought to Jesus, but what about the man? Again, the woman is shown as the evil one of the two, who needed to be punished without any consequences to the man. "The intention was to test and trap Jesus, not to resolve a legal problem."[49] Jesus did not condone the scribes and the Pharisees attempt to trap him, he gave no attention to it. "His writing signals his disengagement from their questions."[50] This is clearly shown in the Gospel of John 8:5-9:

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[48]Johnson, 23.

[49]The New Interpreter's Bible, John 8, commentary notes.

[50]Ibid.

> Now in the Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you have to say? They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.'

In other writings, with an adultery case, legal ramifications for adultery included both the man and the woman being brought forth if any charges were to be made. For example, Deuteronomy 17 states, "then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die."[51] A correct interpretation and thorough exegesis can eliminate any misinterpretation that could result in support for oppression based on John 8:3-11. If misinterpreted, the passage might lead women to believe that only they are held accountable for adultery, and that women are lesser than men, or more evil compared with men. As stated in *The Women's Bible Commentary*:

> The text does not isolate the woman's sin, nor does Jesus single out the woman as 'sinner'. Rather, the text identifies all the characters as in need of and receiving an invitation to new life. Jesus does offer grace and mercy to sinners in this story, but the offer is extended equally to scribes, Pharisees, and women.[52]

History has played a vivid role in the interpretation of the Bible, and the oppressive state in which some women find themselves today. The value of a woman's self-worth, her identity, and her relationship with God is affected by women's history.

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[51]Deuteronomy 17:5.

[52]Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 297.

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance, c.700-c.1500

Ancient Greece and Rome were slave societies.[53] As slaves, women had no rights over their own bodies, could be sexually assaulted by their master, sold to others, were married at an early age and were stripped of their children.[54] Additionally, the slave women were not the only ones who endured discrimination. Masters daughters were confined close to their homes, to reinforce their inability to be slave owners.[55] These women were identified by their practices of going to market, or washing at the well, as these were activities that would exemplify their shameful position of not being able to afford slaves.[56]

In Protestant England, it was an acceptable norm for husbands to beat their wives.[57] Wife beating was a protected act as long as the instrument used was not considered unreasonable.[58] By the late 1800's, the United States finally determined that wife beating was a punishable crime.[59]

Females, favored less than oxen or horses, were possessed by their husbands or fathers. There are multiple examples of these claims in the Bible, one being Exodus 20:17 where rape was considered a less severe crime than homosexuality. There are also

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[53]Norah Carlin, "Women and the Struggle for Socialism," accessed August 1, 2013 http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/contemp/pamsetc/women/ws_main.htm.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Grady, 185.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Ibid.

repetitive stories of Biblical men who offered their virgin daughters up for others to rape. (Genesis 19:7-8 and Judges 19:23-26). Aristotle, renowned Greek philosopher who was a student of Plato and the teacher to Alexander the Great, looked upon women as inferior beings.[60]

In Ancient Greece, Athenian women were given no education and were married at puberty to grown men.[61] They remained forever the property of their fathers, who could arrange a divorce and make them marry another.[62] Athenian women lived in segregation, could not leave the house without a chaperone, and could not buy or sell land.[63] If a woman was raped, her husband had to either divorce her, or lose his citizenship.[64] During this period, society further disgraced raped women by not allowing them to wear jewelry or take part in public ceremonies.[65] Finally, under Roman law, the power of the husband over his wife was absolute, even to the point of killing her.[66]

In the Middle East, a symbol of wealth was to have more than one wife.[67] Wealth played a vital role in the status of middle easterners. More money meant more power, and

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[60]Grady, 185.

[61]Wojtczak.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid.

[67]"The Bible and The Oppression of Women," accessed August 26, 2012, http://slartyobrian.hubpages.com/hub/The-Bible-and-The-Oppression-of-Woman.

a good example of this was the Biblical figure David, who had many wives and many concubines to display his wealth and his power.[68]

The Age of Reformation, c.1500-c.1750

Traditionally the term "Reformation" was used by historians and theologians to refer to the western European movement.[69] The movement was by shutting down female convents which effectively closed off the option of a full time religious role for Protestant women. Martin Luther taught that the wife should stay at home and look at the affairs of the household as one who had been deprived of the ability of administering affairs that are outside and concern of the state. Luther was not alone in this belief; John Calvin was in agreement with Luther's conclusions.

The Modern Period, c.1750—the Present

During the era known as the Modern Period, the topic of oppression of women in Scripture was written by many. In his work, *Feminine Oppression and Empowerment in Historical and Contemporary Judeo-Christianity*, author Joseph Langston writes

> With respect to biblical religion and early religious thought, Eve and the Old Testament have long served as primary sources for women's oppression at the hands of religion. The patriarchal construction of Eve allowed men to pinpoint all women as the source of evil and suffering in this world, and, in a freakish reversal, men 'give birth to the woman with the help of a father God' (Ruether,

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[68]2 Samuel 12: commentary notes.

[69]Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Malden, MA: Allister E. McGrath Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 44.

1975, p. 15). Eve also allows child birth to be interpreted as punishment and provides legitimation for the dominion of husband over wife.[70]

Concerning women today, Langston focuses on the oppression that women suffer as a result of improper interpretation of the scriptures.[71] In pondering male authority over women, Langston's writings cited Francine Cardman, who focused on the topics of women. Cardman agreed that in the early church order, there was a strong tension between church structure and women's roles.

Spanning the first to fifth centuries, the church became increasingly hierarchical, bureaucratized, and institutionalized through the development of its doctrines, teachings, and practices.[72] Practices no longer were about serving God, as the church assumed a greater scope of authority in the economic, social, and political atmosphere. The Greco-Roman world adopted survival modes for the sake of acceptance and potential religious growth, and traded off cultural values.[73] The overall perspective of the church became about politics, and church ministries implied women as the lesser need, and therefore women became sacrifices for empowerment toward greater mainstream legitimacy.[74] Women continued to be vital to the church and exercise some leadership within the church structure, but the importance of the leadership was limited by the scope in which

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[70]Joseph Langston, "In Feminine Oppression and Empowerment in Historical and Contemporary Judeo-Christianity," accessed October 23, 2013, http://www.academia.edu/1480846/FeminineOppression and Empowerment in Historical and Contemporary Judeo-Christianity Feminine Oppression and Empowerment in Historical and Contemporary Judeo-Christianity.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Ibid.

[74]Ibid.

they could operate.[75] The centuries progressed on with the concept of church leadership being a male dominated role, and the role of women increasingly narrowed as time progressed.[76]

The myth was that to be respectable to the outside world, women had to be in subordinate positions, below male leadership. Second, the misinterpretation of the Bible led to structural leadership that systematically resulted in women being controlled, silenced and excluded. Incorrect teachings have been the basis for oppression of women in some churches, and the patriarchal structure continues to be the model in which church standards and political guidelines have operated in the modern day. These guidelines do not allow for spiritual freedom, or liberation for women, in order for them to reach spiritual maturity in God.

Nicholas Kristof captured part of Jimmy Carter's famous speech in his article, *Does Religion Oppress Women,* which states:

> The truth is that male religious leaders have had—and still have—an option to interpret holy teachings either to exalt or subjugate women. They have, for their own selfish ends, overwhelmingly chosen the latter. Their continuing choice provides the foundation or justification for much of the pervasive persecution and abuse of women throughout the world. This is in clear violation not just of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul, Moses and the prophets, Muhammad, and founders of other great religions—all of whom have called for proper and equitable treatment of all the children of God. It is time we had the courage to challenge these views and set a new course that demands equal rights for women and men, girls and boys.[77]

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[75]Langston.

[76]Ibid.

[77]Nicholas Kristof, "Does Religion Oppress Women," accessed December 15, 2013, http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/15/does-religion-oppress-women/ /2009/12/15.

> At their most repugnant, the belief that women are inferior human beings in the eyes of God gives excuses to the brutal husband who beats his wife, the soldier who rapes a woman, the employer who has a lower pay scale for women employees, or parents who decide to abort a female embryo. It also costs many millions of girls and women control over their own bodies and lives, and continues to deny them fair and equal access to education, health care, employment, and influence within their own communities.[78]

It is interesting to note that although spousal abuse in the twentieth century still remained a problem, women gained political rights and equal access in the work place.[79] However, the National Council on Domestic Violence says that a woman is battered every fifteen seconds in this country.[80] Unfortunately, in churches the problem is often swept under the rug and Christian leaders do not know how to deal with it or stop physical and spiritual abuse. Combining the solution to domestic violence and theology is difficult to reconcile. The church teachings about marriage were one sided, and displayed the ugly truth as to the denial within Christian churches of male bias when it came to women's freedom.[81]

Women have historically been derided as unclean and characterized as sexual beings. This belief has become the norm within society. Women, characterized as romantic and idealistic, are excluded from full participation of the sacramental systems in the Catholic community.[82] Furthermore, women were excluded from significant decision

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[78]Kristof.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Johnson, 23.

making roles in government and the liturgical assembly.[83] Women take on a peripheral role in which they are called to honor a male savior sent by an illegitimate representative of God.[84] They are necessary but restricted in the roles they can occupy and the ways in which they fit in the official life of the church. Over three-fourths of starving people are women with their dependent children who are raped, murdered and abused.[85] To make a dark picture even bleaker, women are bodily and sexually exploited as well. The indisputable fact is that men do this to women in a way that women do not do to men. Sexism is rampant on a global scale.[86]

In Joseph Langston's writings, he proposes the thought that if it is true that church, canonical writings and ecclesiastical authorities are responsible for oppression, then why do women accept the interpretations that bind them? As intellectual beings, exploitation of social change, the Bible, and organizational authority provide a choice, not a force. Joseph Langston states:

> It suffices to say, however, that in our modern world and in industrial and post-industrial societies, the current meanings assigned to religious experience and the reasons given for religious participation are likely to be simultaneously similar to and different from the historical reasons. This is to say that, because of the way modern religious life differs from the same life in the past, the old reasons are likely to remain (e.g. continuity of tradition, social and divine expectations), with only new ones having been added. As for why women would willingly participate in the modern religious life, given the degree to which patriarchal religion has maintained continuity through time, the answer partly lies in the fact that, when it comes to the resources, power, and other assets that women have available to

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[83]Johnson, 23.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid.

[86]Kristof.

> them in terms of making gender progress, the church itself, and women's activities therein, ironically have come to serve as a primary starting point. The answer also partly lies in the fact that religion caters to certain psychological needs for women, and also can be seen to provide them with an existential framework, a space within which to claim a meaningful and clear sense of self, community, and belonging. The very institution which played such a central role in the establishment and continuation of women's inferiority today plays a similar role in upsetting this same subordination by proving itself to be a very fertile field upon which women could achieve empowerment.[87]

In researching the findings, the researcher has evidence to believe that history has played a large part in instilling hermeneutics that oppress women. Proper hermeneutical guidelines can make the distinction between oppressive behavior and liberation in Christ. Improper methodology can lead to dangerous circumstances. In 2 Peter it is written, "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."[88] Therefore, it is very possible and a legitimate defense that misinterpretation of scripture has aided in the oppression of women. What history has shown us is that a need for constructive order in Christianity and society has been the basis for oppression of women in the church.

Jack Seay, in the article, *The Importance of Context in Biblical Interpretation* states:

> Unfortunately, many people would like to have churches unite by compromising the truth. A much better unity will result by going to the Bible and studying it in all its contexts, allowing it to teach us. The test of what is true should not be denominational creeds or doctrinal statements. What we believe should not be based on tradition, church history, personal opinion, wishful thinking, prejudice, bias, or unquestioning acceptance of what we have been taught. The final test of truth is the accurate interpretation of the Bible in any area it touches upon. God

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[87]Langston.

[88]2 Peter 3:16.

> has shared with man a part of His infinite knowledge. We must find out what He meant by what He said.[89]

Simply stated, the task of interpreters of the Bible is to find out the meaning of a statement (command, question) for the author and for the first hearers or readers, and thereupon to transmit that meaning to modern readers. The interpreter will observe whether a given statement tends to be understood by a modern reader identically, similarly, or differently from the sense intended by the writer, and will adjust his explanation accordingly.[90]

"There are churches that allow and provide for the ordination of women, yet their overall leadership privileges are stifled by various means and for the same or similar reasons that other churches do not ordain them."[91] Religious patriarchy is one of the strongest forms of the structure, for it understands itself to be divinely established. Consequently, the power of the ruling men is said by them to be delegated by God, (invariably spoken about in male terms) and exercised by divine mandate.[92] "The situation of the oppressed is defined not only by their oppressors but also by the way in which they react to oppression, resist it, and fight to set themselves free from it."[93]

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[89]Jack Seay, "The Importance of Context in Biblical Interpretation," accessed October 3, 2013, http://contextbible.com/context.html.

[90]Ibid.

[91]Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 75.

[92]Johnson, 23.

[93]Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 27.

> Women are equally created in the image and likeness of God, equally redeemed by Christ, equally sanctified by the Holy Spirit; women are equally involved in the ongoing tragedy of sin and the mystery of grace, equally called to mission in this world, equally destined for life with God in glory.[94]

Theological

The purpose of this examination is to expose the injustices of female oppression through hermeneutics. Oppression has become a systematic practice of patriarchy, and the task is to reclaim the women's experience. This simply means to acknowledge the full humanness of women, and the imbalance of injustice that has gone on for centuries in the church and society. The distorted view of women that is present in scriptures, church history and Christian theology has had a dehumanizing effect that has been suppressed, and has contributed to the long history of oppression endured by women. Being faithful to the gospel will eliminate and challenge attitudes and structures of patriarchy.[95]

The word theology comes from two Greek words, logos and theos, which translates, "Thinking about God."[96] The starting point for this examination of theology would be the definition of theology itself. Theology is defined as the study of God. Whether God is a he, she, or it, is still debatable within the patriarchal view of men, as well as the feminist opinion of women. Some may refer to the deity as God/theo, in its

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[94]Johnson, 8.

[95]Mark G. Toulouse and Duke O. James, eds., *Sources of Christian Theology in America* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 482.

[96]Ronald J. Allen, *Thinking Theologically: The Preacher as a Theologian* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 4.

masculine form, or Goddess/theism in the more feminist form. The theological debate has remained a topic of discussion throughout the centuries.[97]

In relation to liberation theology, the term was coined in 1971, by the Peruvian priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez. According to Gutierrez true liberation has three main dimensions:

> First, it involves political and social liberation, the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and injustice. Second, liberation involves the emancipation of the poor, the marginalised, the downtrodden and the oppressed from all 'those things that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity.' Third, Liberation Theology involves liberation from selfishness and sin, a re-establishment of a relationship with God and with other people[98]

Oppression in this examination is not reviewed in relation to social, political or materially oppressive behaviors, as much as the study of hermeneutics that foster oppression in women. Liberation theology in this context is seen as a commitment to the oppressed in life, and freedom toward a just and free way of living that will allow women to be uplifted and encouraged through the word of God, not dehumanized or oppressed through wrongful interpretation. In short, liberation theology is a prophetic response to the oppressed. Freedom is the opposite of oppression. In the Bible, oppression arises out of the understanding of the Exodus of the freeing of the Israelites. The revelation takes place in the liberation of the oppressed, Israel, and is completed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

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[97]Sharon James, "How and Why to Do a Theology on Everything," accessed October 23, 2013, http://www.theologynetwork.org/theology-of-everything.

[98]Gustavo Gutiérrez biography, accessed February 1, 2014, http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/151379.6.

James H. Cone suggests in his book *A Black Theology of Liberation* that humans cannot be fully human when their creativity is enslaved by alien powers. Alien powers in this stance would be anything outside of the righteousness of God. To be fully human is to be separated from everything that is evil that is against the extension of the limits of humanity. Human existence reveals the reality of evil being an ever-present possibility in a finite world, and to be fully human means to be identified with those who are enslaved to fight against human evil. It means joining sides with those who are the victims of evil. It means becoming oppressed with the oppressed, making their cause one's own by getting involved oneself in the liberation struggle. How can there be freedom when everyone is not free?[99]

A hermeneutical situation has been created by feminists in an effort to gain the freedom of oppressed women. The Bible is a living book that tells the story about God's dealings with God's people, and it cannot be negated by the authority of male experiences or voided in regard to the human experience of liberation from oppression. A re-reading of the Bible needs to be embraced through a political commitment, informed by social and cultural analyses. Social analysis leads to uncovering the causes of evil and exploitation. Through re-reading the Bible, many people will begin to speak of the "Hermeneutical privilege for the oppressed" and of God's bias toward the injustice.[100]

James Cone, in his book, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, states:

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[99]James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1986), 87-88.

[100]James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 150-151.

> theological activities do not end with the exposition of biblical texts on salvation or liberation of people by God. In the Bible, the exodus, the activities of the prophets, and the event of the cross offer new insights, but these texts ought to be rediscovered and reinterpreted in the context of the human struggle for historical and political liberation today.[101]

It is unfortunate that the oppressed are expected to look to the oppressors to validate their freedom in Christ. Women can no longer ignore the patriarchal behaviors of men and "church folk," expecting the oppressors to lay down new ground rules and pave the way to transformation. Women do not begin liberation theology outside of the suffering of women's experiences. Acknowledging the oppression of women will begin the transformation toward acknowledging the full humanity of women, and their experiences as purposeful contributions to the Kingdom of God. The transformation cannot happen unless there is dialog about the uniqueness of black women's experience. Theologians develop theology in complex religio-cultural contexts and with the political commitment upon the meaning of God, in solidarity with liberating the oppressed. Theology then is a reflection upon the meaning of God by those who are struggling to overcome cultural and political domination. It is an aid to help victims in their struggle to overcome their victimization.[102] Truth is concrete, and it is inseparable from the oppressed who are struggling for freedom.[103] Truth cannot be truth unless the sin is

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[101]Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church,* 150-151.

[102]Ibid.

[103]Ibid.

exposed. Domination, sexism, patriarchism along with the social analysis that makes up the church has to be destroyed.[104]

Women are affected psychologically, socially, mentally and politically when scriptures have been viewed through a lens that does not value them as equal members of God's family. So that improperly interpreting scripture puts women at a disadvantage in all aspects of their lives.[105] As a result of misinterpretation, women often suffer from rape, incest, domestic violence, and sexual harassment.[106] The results also flow into social stereotyping, low-paid and gender segregated employment, discrimination in educational and occupational institutions and, unavoidably, patriarchy.[107]

The examiner believes that liberation theology, defined through Christology and sin, are contributing factors, if the hermeneutics of the scriptures are misinterpreted. They may serve as a factor which may create oppression in women. The basics from which each prophet teaches, (prophet meaning anointed of God, to hear from God) are questionable. The prophet is accountable to exegete scripture, and to bring enlightenment to the captives. If there should be any oppression then whose account do we believe? Are we to believe the interpreters are inaccurate or the word is not complete in its stance? The

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[104]Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church,* 150-151.

[105]Martha E. Gimenez, "Capitalism and the Oppression of Women, Marx Revisted," accessed September 9, 2013, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fpdf-release.net%2Fexternal%2F4424987%2Fpdf-release-dot-net-marx%2520and%2520feminism.pdf&ei=5ZDqU4_XLufjsASL3IHACQ&usg=AFQjCNFhQsJjYz7V7uUEdawvXIFOwe63QQ.

[106]Ibid.

[107]Ibid.

prophet, the teacher, the preacher, theologian and philosopher are expected to do justice to the Bible by being "experts" to explicate the word of God.[108] Therefore, a problematic system has occurred in which a long history of misinterpretation has been debated throughout history.

Human beings have tried to capture what it means to be made in the image of God, through theology. However, if it is in man's human nature to sin, how do we entrust mere mortals to our salvation? It is then impossible to leave aside that Christology provides the explanation as to why we are saved in spite of our sins.

Daniel L. Migliore, in *Faith Seeking Understanding*, equates sin to a condition or state in which the whole of humanity finds itself.[109] In the book of Romans 7:14-15, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice but what I hate, that I do."

How, then, does the status of sin impact on interpretation? Mainly, interpretation has to be seen as contextual analysis based on personal experiences, with the understanding that we make up our minds based on our experiences. Therefore, interpretation needs to be understood as a practice. The practice of interpretation should be based on moral ethics, and the authority of Jesus' Word. In doing so, we must practice theology as a judgment on all life, by bringing to life the redemptive power of God's cleansing.[110]

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[108]James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 8.

[109]Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 164.

A good example of this is the interpretation and sin underlying the historically patriarchal view that Jesus' maleness can be used as a universal principal to foster the subordination of women. Therefore, many women feel separated from the community and unsure that a male God can relate to the femininity of women. Many interpretations of the Bible are taken as meaning that God should be seen exclusively as male. "The gender of Jesus has been taken to be the mode or paradigm of what it means to be man."[111] This is interpreted literally to mean that maleness is closer to human ideal than is femaleness.[112]

In *Feminist Christology,* Elizabeth Johnson, states:

> Jesus preaching proclaims justice and peace for all people, inclusive of women. The reign of God is diametrically opposed to any group setting itself up as exclusively privileged and relegating others of the periphery. The vision of the reign of God is precisely a vision of community where every human person is valued and all interrelate in a mutually respectful way.[113]

Christology is the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ, and soteriology the doctrine of his saving work.[114] When we combine the human nature of men that abounds with sin, and the incarnate Jesus within us, then what is it that Jesus has to do with

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[110]James K.A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 51.

[111]Elizabeth Johnson, "A Call For National Dialogue on Women in Church Leadership," accessed August 13, 2012, http://www.bobcornwall.com/2009/09/jesus-and-scandal-of-particularity.html.

[112]Ibid.

[113]Ibid.

[114]Migliore, 164.

oppression? Daniel L. Migliore's explication on oppression and Jesus is described in the writings of James Cone, who contends:

> The identity of Jesus must be seen in who he was, who he is, and who he will be. Jesus is 'who he was…the one who lived with the poor and died on the cross'; Jesus is 'who he is,' present now with the poor, helping them to 'struggle for the maintenance of humanity in a situation of oppression'; Jesus is 'who he will be,' the coming Lord who empowers the oppressed to 'keep on keeping on even when their fight seems fruitless.'[115]

Jon Sobrino emphasizes the political dimension of the resurrection of Christ. He proclaims the triumph of God over all injustice and violence, the event that gives all victims of history a new and lasting hope. The cross of Christ, and the suffering of crucified people of history provide the most apt setting for the understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. The Cross is a symbol of the place of the poor and the despised, and that the risen Jesus will be found.[116]

The correlation between sin and Christology are simple. The sin is the patriarchal behavior exhibited by men to control and oppress women. This control limits women in their efforts and ability to reach their full humanity.

Sin is the systematic and structural evil that allows a tiny minority of the human race to use up the resources that exist for all. Sin is the power and principalities that work against the oppressed, the majority of whom are women, children, and indigenous people. Sin is the absence of love and compassion. It occurs when we close our ears and eyes to the cries of the people, the rivers and trees. Sin is the brokenness that drives people to

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[115] Migliore, 206.

[116] Kwok Pui-lan, "Introducing Asian Feminist Theology," accessed July 1, 2013, http://www.womenpriests.org/theology/kPui-lan.asp.

despair. Salvation, therefore, entails right relationship with one another, caring for the planet, and compassion for the weaker links in the chain of life, while constantly remembering that human beings are part of nature and the natural process.[117]

Christology is the salvation through which humanity is considered intentional and purposed entities of God. God's Spirit through incarnation dwells also within women. Christology is what will enable men to put aside fleshly desires, and act justly in the eyes of God. Oppressive behavior toward women is mostly encouraged by the egos of men. Some men feel that women are to be submissive and subordinate to male authority. But it is the sin in the human nature that leads to the belief that it is justified to oppress women. The salvation is Christology, where women and all others find relief in the resurrection of Jesus. As summarized by Kwok Pui-lan, "For his resurrection is the origin of our freedom."[118]

The incarnated Spirit of God that dwells in each of us derives from a place of insurmountable despair and hopelessness to a place of grace. Sin is the culprit that allows the patriarchy of men to misinterpret scripture, and foster oppression of women.

It is then through redemption and the incarnate Jesus within the human race, that we become free from bondage. We gain the opportunity to develop one's potential, the well-being of one's family and community, the freedom from warfare and other forms of violence, the availability of a life-sustaining eco-system and a sense of hope and security for the future. Salvation opens the dialogue for teachings of Jesus Christ for right living,

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[117]Pui-lan.

[118]Ibid.

His relationship to other human beings, his wisdom and justice, and his promise of God's compassion to all humankind; it is the larger context of his struggle for justice. The resurrection can be viewed as a rebirth that gives new hope. Sin then becomes not so much human depravity or disobedience, but the breaking down of the interconnectedness of all things, which threatens the flow of life.[119]

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire states, "As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away oppressors power to *dominate* and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression."[120] Incarnation is what brings men to full perfection in God. "This perfection, at least implicitly sought, desired, and hoped for by all men, is transcendent and infinite and can only be found in God."[121]

In 1979 The International Theological Commission stated at its plenary:

> The identity and perfection of man as they are found in Christ challenge any human absolution that the sinner chooses for himself. For this reason the preaching of the Gospel cannot be separated from a warning of judgment and a call to conversion. The following of the cross and communion with the crucified Jesus Christ do not destroy men but signify and can even bring about the end of many forms of alienation, which results ultimately from the power of sin and the slavery of the law and death. This signifies and confers the freedom to which we have been called through Jesus Christ.[122]

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[119]Pui-lan.

[120]Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 1973), 56.

[121]International Theological Commission Theology, Christology, Anthropology, accessed July 31, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1982_teologia-cristologia-antropologia_en.html.

[122]Ibid.

Christology and its declaration have made it possible for reconciliation with Christ. The embodiment of His holy spirit within us is what makes women co-partners with God, and thus equal with men in the walk of salvation.

The sin of sexism is otherwise known as androcentrism, from the Greek word andros, or adult male; its vision of humanity is created around the adult male. In this paradigm, the norm is that the males have all of the authority, that women are devoid of authority and are secondary, independent of their own rights as a human.[123] The reasoning that underlies patriarchy is sexism, which is based around politics. The basis on which oppression is fostered against women has led to political stagnation, and has been allowed to breed and grow in all aspects of social, political, and religious lives, including the churches, and taking a stance against the liberties of God. There should be no separation of church and state; the church should lead and the state should follow.

But what does sin and Christology have to do with oppression and what do they have to do with Jesus Christ? How do we separate Jesus from the oppressed? How do we suggest in human nature where God dwells and where the incarnate sin is present?

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff state, "The Spirit presides over the religious experience of peoples, not allowing them to forget the dimension of eternity or succumb to the appeals of the flesh." [124] Hence, should the spirit at some point take preventative measures to turn around the hierarchy that rules the church?

> The history of the struggles of the oppressed for their liberation is the history of the call of the Holy Spirit to the heart of a divided world. It is because of the

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[123]Elizabeth Johnson, accessed July 1, 2013, http://www.womenpriests.org/classic2/johnson3.asp.

[124]Boff, 55.

> Spirit that the ideals of equality and fellowship, the utopia of a world in which it will be easier to love and recognize in the face of the other the maternal and paternal features of God, will never be allowed to die or be forgotten under the pressure of resignation.[125]

Jesus took on human guilt in the incarnation. Being free from guilt, humanity is able to resist the lure of original sin.[126] Because of human nature; humans are susceptible to self-gratification and sin. Without God (incarnate) being a part of human intervention, man would be lost. Only a changed mind (new creature, reformed mind) with the embodiment of the Spirit of God can be expected to at least try to correctly interpret the word of God. That same teacher is expected to set aside any personal agendas or biases that may affect the liberation of one of God's children. The liberation is the result of the Spirit of God.

Mark G. Toulouse and James O. Duke, in *Sources of Christian Theology in America*, state:

> The truth is that man is tempted by the basic insecurity of human existence to make himself doubly secure and by the insignificance of his place in the total scheme of life to prove his significance. The will–to-power is in short both a direct form and an indirect instrument of the pride which Christianity regards as sin in its quintessential form.[127]

The opposite of oppression would be liberation. "Liberation is knowledge of self; it is a vocation to affirm who I am created to be. Furthermore, it is clear from divine

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[125]Boff, 56.

[126]Michael Padget, "Christology and Original Sin: Charles Hodge and Edward Irving Compared," accessed August 31, 2013, http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/121-03_229.pdf.

[127]Toulouse and Duke, 446.

revelation as witnessed in scripture that authentic liberation of self is attainable only in the context of an oppressed community in the struggle of freedom."[128]

Is it possible to reform a body of believers and to will them to do the work of the Lord, and to correctly interpret the word of God in a manner that does not hinder or oppress women? A starting point would be hermeneutics, specifically, hermeneutics of liberation that questions the word of God. His word can save or condemn, but it is of primary importance that the goal is to call attention to the sovereign power of God that calls women to conversion, faith, commitment, and justice through leaders. It is undeniably clear that Jesus Christ is against oppression. His word says in Isaiah 61:1-3:

> The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the Lord's favor has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies. To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for his glory.

It is therefore, contradictory that a just God would condone sin in any forum, especially within the church due to politics or patriarchy.

In conclusion, the humanistic and historical task of dealing with oppression has been to begin where it stands. Therefore, the task for humans is to begin tackling oppression based upon the history that has been provided. Hermeneutics that foster oppression in women can be summed up to be a sinful act committed by those in a hierarchy, whether they are men or other women. Throughout history, human nature has been used to falsely justify the patriarchal position of men to keep women from coming

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[128]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 134-135.

into their full humanity. Christology, however, is that saving grace that gives power to the weak, to liberate those who have been oppressed, exploited and raped by virtue of that power. Manifestation of that freedom comes with transformative actions.

> In the Bible the objective reality of reconciliation is connected with divine liberation. This means that human fellowship with God is made possible through God's activity in history, setting people free from economic, social, and political bondage. God's act of reconciliation is not a mystical communion with the divine; nor is it a pietistic state of inwardness bestowed upon the believer. God's reconciliation is a new relationship with people created by God's concrete involvement in the political affairs of the world, taking sides with the weak and the helpless.[129]

The gospel is the good news. The gospel is a summary of the liberation, the joyful news, and glad tidings. Therefore, evangelism in any form should be an uplifting experience and a loving conviction to turn from sin, and trust in the incarnation of Jesus. This incarnation moves us above the regular worship service, the choir's singing, and the brothers and sisters shouting when the will of the Lord to liberate his people comes through and the context of the text is being abated. Amos 5 states:

> Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. As interpretations of God we are accountable to preach of the transforming power of God. The word is meant to free people and allow Christians to work together for justice and righteousness.[130]

James H. Harris, in *Pastoral Theology*, states,

> Jesus had little toleration for the middle–or upper-class religious snob whose attitude attempted to usurp the sovereignty of God and destroy the dignity of the poor…The kingdom which the poor may enter is not merely an eschatological longing for escape to transcendent reality, nor is it an inward serenity which eases unbearable suffering. Rather, it is God encountering man in the very depths of his

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[129]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 209.

[130]Amos 5:23-24.

> being-in-the world and releasing him from all human evils, like racism, which hold him captive.[131]

The more human nature and sin is used to rationalize patriarchal actions, the more man is devoid of the power of faith and cannot free himself from distortions and rationalizations.[132] "True Peace is not merely the absence of some negative force-tension, confusion or war; it is the presence of some positive force-justice, good will and brotherhood."[133]

James Cone, in his book, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church,* invites his readers to view their relationship with God by how they treat the poor. He encourages his readers to really understand who the 'poor' are and opens his readers' minds and hearts to truly understand the term. He accomplishes this by quoting the well-known theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez, who said:

> To know God is to do justice, is to be in solidarity with the poor person. And it is to be in solidarity with that poor person as he or she actually exists today-as someone who is oppressed, as a member of an exploited class, or ethnic group, or culture, or nation. At the same time, relationship with God who has loved me despoils me, strips me. It universalizes my love for others and makes it gratuitous too.[134]

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[131]Harris, 25.

[132]Toulouse and Duke, 486.

[133]Ibid., 482.

[134]Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church*, 196.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

The project implementation will take place at GHHBC in Yale, Virginia. The women of GHHBC will participate in a program to determine if they feel limited in their spiritual walk. An eight week training course will be administered by the author who is an associate minister of GHHBC. Analysis of standardized information collected through questionnaires and structured teachings will be completed to obtain necessary information to complete the model. The data analysis and data collected will be non-quantitative.

Authors Strauss and Corbin describe one of the considerations for using a qualitative methodology as a better way to understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. The technique can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively.[1]

Problem Statement

This project will examine empowering women at GHHBC to confront bias that is often found in traditional church settings. These biases can hinder women from taking

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[1]A. Strauss and J. Corbin, *Basic of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1990), 525.

leadership roles in churches, incomplete development of their spiritual gifts, feelings of frustration by misinterpretation by scripture, and cause a feeling of disconnection from God. It is not an intentional stifling of the growth of the women; it is tradition and religion which has caused these women to feel a spiritual ignorance. Under the influence of the masculine voice of the Bible, the patriarchal teachings of the Bible have resonated in a display of 'dead' women walking. The contentment to be cast into the role of servant based on the biblical teachings can contribute to the disempowerment of women rather than to uplift them.

Anne M. Clifford, in *Introducing Feminist Theology*, states, "the language in some texts make them 'period pieces', suffering under the limitations of historical patriarchal influences in form and context."[2] Unfortunately, the oppressive nature that begins in the church has contributed to the perception that women have of themselves. This perception has contributed to choking the life from these women bringing a sense of degradation rather than a sense of pride and glory. When scripture burdens and does not bring the good news to women it weakens them. The inability to feel God as 'relatable' causes a disconnection and leaves women feeling isolated and without purpose. The patriarchal structure has left these women feeling spiritually dead and undervalued as human beings. These feelings of inadequacy can lead to suicide, self-loathe, domestic violence, promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, drug usage and low self-esteem/worth. Overall, it leaves the inability to develop one's spiritual gifts destined by God in order to develop an authentic and unbiased relationship with God.

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[2]Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 37.

The church is the foundation and has set the precedent outside the church on how women perceive themselves. I arrived at this conclusion personally as a woman minister and impersonally through the data collected.

- Sermons that exclude women or are bias to women are so because they are rarely examined with a critical eye.
- No new meanings are ever created.
- Seldom consider the historical foundation.
- There is seldom a consideration for the interpreter as opposed to the text 'he' is interpreting. The hermeneutical task is seldom seen through 'her' experience or lens.
- Inclusive language is almost never used.
- No attempt is ever made to try and understand what the text once said and the articulation of that content in such a way that its message becomes a serious alternative for us today.[3]

Greek philosopher Aristotle described the natural organization of society as a hierarchy of graded subordinations. He argued that according to nature it is fitting for the soul to govern the body, the master to govern the slave, and the male to govern the female. In each case one (the first) is superior, the other is inferior, for one governs and the other is inferior, for one governs and the other is governed. Not confronting the problem cause a generational curse of women walking in spiritual blindness unable to empower other women to break from under the bondage of spiritual oppression. Ignoring the problem will only negate the opportunity for the development of spiritual gifts, purpose and liberation. Although Feminist and Womanist theologies continue to advocate

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[3]Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *The Biblical Interpreter* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 15.

for equal justice for women, the gap to reach women has been stifled by the domination of male leadership and a cultural ideology that favors the male experience, thinking, and values.[4]

Purpose Statement

The focus of the study is to empower the women of GHHBC to confront bias that is present in the traditional church setting. Biblical hermeneutics which study the principles concerning the interpretation of the Bible is vital to the liberation of the women of GHHBC. Misinterpretation of the scriptures can result in a life of bondage and the hindrance of walking in God's will.

The patriarchal history of misinterpretation of the scriptures associated with the church and tradition has greatly influenced the inability of women to be their authentic selves. Having a misconstrued understanding of scriptures that fosters oppression in women is caused many women to remain in unhealthy situations including domestic violence, teenage promiscuity and suicide. These situations have resulted in a disconnect from God. Unjust and misguided teachings separate women from the liberty of being in Christ and feeling the embrace God's agape love. Increasing the knowledge of these women will enable them to discover their spiritual gifts and empower these women, and others, to be liberated. The church is supposed to be the place of restoration, enlightenment, and strength for hungry souls. Instead it has been the stronghold to support the bias against women.

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[4]Rohrbaugh, 15.

Ultimately, there are no positive outcomes when an individual is oppressed. Correct interpretation of scripture will produce spiritual opportunities for women to freely exercise their spiritual gifts without condemnation. Exploring the Word in freedom and leisure will allow women to experience God on a much deeper level. The research will examine the use of standard evangelical strategies used and utilize a methodology to stimulate the liberation of oppressed women within the church structure.

Hypothesis

The use of teaching and training the women at Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church to give them the tools to eradicate the bias will bring liberation to these women and help them to empower other women.

The model presented to the women of GHHBC will support the advancement of leadership to help in the spiritual growth and the development of their gifts. Applying the hermeneutical approach will use the grammatical words, syntactical aspects, cultural and historical background to better equip the women to see the scripture in proper context. This model will provide these women the tools and give them the knowledge about scripture resulting in their ability to see themselves as fully human.

Objectives

The main objective for this project is to help women properly understand how to exegete a text and read a text in context that they may develop their purpose and empower other women to have an authentic relationship with God, free of bias due to

patriarchal teachings. As volunteers in this implementation, the women of GHHBC will feel empowered to walk with purpose and objectively evaluate what God is saying to them personally as women. Additionally, this knowledge and the resources used with these women will empower the entire church body. Women will be eager to help build the church and embrace the 'outcast' who is labeled as a jezebel. The intent of the project gives special attention on 'interpretation' in order that women may develop an understanding of the Word for themselves. I intend this project to be the first in a series of programs developed to empower women and cultivate their gifts and see God objectively. Seeing God objectively means seeing God without bias. This implementation will continue through the many stages of 'healing' for broken women in order that they may find liberation. The success of this project will increase leadership for women clergy and enhance roles and bring awareness to a new 'tradition' church through the continuation of programs that empower adult women, teens and girls.

Overall, this dissemination of information will ultimately provide for the transformation needed to assist women in their relationship with God. In addition, it will strengthen the entire church body so it reflects what is found in 1st Corinthians 12:22-27:

> In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

The author anticipates that the model will be a continuing teaching aid used with the women in surrounding geographic area. The effects of the curriculum is hoped to

encourage other women to start their own ministries, fulfill their purpose and help other women know of the unconditional love of God.

Research Design

Paradigms for investigation and determination of the meaning of scripture will be used in addition to the hermeneutical approach which focuses on the complete meaning of the writings. The methods used will be qualitative, utilizing the Bible as the main source, interviewing, lecturing, sermons, journaling and questionnaires to assess the growth of the participants. Upon the project implementation, the participants will be given specific scriptures that have been often used to hinder women. This will be used to gauge the status of the group and observation by the author. The questionnaire will focus on questions that predetermine the women's fundamental understanding concerning the interpretation of those scriptures. The women will also answer questions inquiring about their spiritual gifts and/or their purpose in the church.

Through exploratory research using lectures, seminars, sermons, and teachings on the proper exegesis of scripture and living in purpose the participants will be asked to journal, will be interviewed and be given homework assignments associated with the class. The progression of their liberation process will be determined after eight weeks. The results will ascertain if these women feel they have discovered their spiritual gifts and purpose. A post-assessment questionnaire will be given to measure the change in their perception of the same scriptures presented at the beginning of the project.

Measurement

The measurement will be gained through information gathered from pre/post questionnaires, journaling and interviewing. The Likert Scale will be used for the survey questions during the pre/post questionnaire.

> The Likert Scale questions use psychometric testing to measure beliefs, attitudes, and opinion. This form of method allow the respondent to then indicate how much they disagree or agree with the statement. The main advantage of the Likert Scale is that they use a universal method of collecting data, which makes it easy to understand and to draw conclusions, reports, results and graphs from the responses.[5]

Through the Likert Scale a visible transformation will be evident. The degree to which each participant feel towards being oppressed, recognizing spiritual gifts, or capable of empowering other women will be evident. The questionnaire will be given to determine the understanding of an Old and New Testaments.

The scriptures that will be used are scriptures commonly known to oppress women. An example is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 which is grounded in hierarchy but the main purpose in this setting was to maintain the peace. Paul offered solutions to women who were vocal and opinionated because of their new found faith as Christians. Exegesis of the scripture will overcome any notion that fosters false liberation in women. The women will also write a brief understanding of their interpretation of the scriptures. What does this scripture say to them? How does this scripture make them feel? Additional questions will be given to inquire if the women of GHHBC feel they understand their

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[5]"Advantages of Using Likert Scale Questions," The Smartsurvey.com, accessed November 3, 2013, http://blog.smartsurvey.co.uk/advantages-of-using-likert-scale-questions.

spiritual gifts and/or purpose and if they feel they are in an atmosphere conducive to moving toward their purpose.

Week One: begins with the teaching of exegesis of scripture. The curriculum includes guides for interpretation of the Old Testament and the New Testament, introducing exegesis, and the task of exegesis. Each participant will be given eight biblical scriptures about women in the Bible and they will be asked to exegete passages throughout the training sessions using these guidelines. The purpose is to show the women how to properly exegete scripture in context. The main component is to omit the bias within scripture that may oppress women. The participants will be asked to exegete the meaning of scripture using their own interpretations. They will be asked to discover any bias in their journaling that may hinder women. The responses in their journaling will be discussed in the next class before their new scripture assignments are given.

During the eight week training each weekend will be specifically designed to aid the women in the knowledge needed to exegete scripture. The particular Biblical stories are as follows:

Essay Questions

1. Eve: Genesis Chapter 3: 1-16 - Provide your interpretation of these passages? Where do you see any bias or oppression nature concerning Eve in these passages?

2. Esther: Chapter 1 - Provide your interpretation of these passages? Where do you see any bias or oppression nature concerning Eve in these passages?

3. Deborah: Judges Chapter 4 & 5 - Provide your interpretation of these passages? Where do you see any bias or oppression nature concerning Eve in these passages?

4. Leah and Rachel: Genesis: Chapter 30 - Provide your interpretation of these passages? Where do you see any bias or oppression nature concerning Eve in these passages?

5. Bathsheba: 2 Samuel Chapter 11 - Provide your interpretation of these passages? Where do you see any bias or oppression nature concerning Eve in these passages?

6. Mary (Jesus' Mother) Matthew: 1:18-25 - Provide your interpretation of these passages? Where do you see any bias or oppression nature concerning Eve in these passages?

7. Hagar: Genesis: Chapter 21 - Provide your interpretation of these passages? Where do you see any bias or oppression nature concerning Eve in these passages?

8. Romans 16: After reading these scriptures on the women of the Bible in these passages what are your feelings on God's purpose for women in the church?

Week Two: The Likert Scale questions will be discussed in depth. The women will be answering using the scale of Strong Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. The following questions and Likert Scale will be utilized.

1. Do you believe there are valid reasons not to ordain women?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2. Do you believe there is any validity in the writings of Paul based on the questioning of the authenticity of the Pauline letters?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3. Do you think the social-economic and political aspects of the past bear the infliction of bias towards women of the church today, i.e. inability to vote, viewed as subordinate to men, home makers, helpmate, race, gender, class?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. Do you believe questioning any biblical text is inappropriate or unorthodox because it is the word of God?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. Do you feel like you have discovered your spiritual gift and purpose?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. Do you feel empowered to help other women discover their spiritual gift and purpose?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7. Do the stories of the women in the Bible leave you feeling uplifted and loved by God or downtrodden and sadden by the experience of the character?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. Do you contribute the violence against women as indicative to the truth about patriarchy?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

To address question one without bias and intentional persuasion the author will use differing opinions of materials gathered from books and internet sources for the class discussion.

Week Three: Assessment questions will be given to gain a glimpse of the basic biblical understanding of each woman. The assessment questions will also attempt to gain any insight on preconceived notions or perceptions about how the women view God and any bias. The assessment will be an indicator on the spiritual level of each woman giving the author an indicator on where to begin her discussion with the class. The assessment questions are as follows:

Assessment Questions

1. How do you view God? What experiences have shaped that perception?
2. Describe God in your own words.
3. Write your own definition of oppression. Have you ever experienced oppression?
4. What does empowerment look like to you as a woman? In the church? Outside the church?
5. What is exegesis? What is hermeneutics?
6. Define patriarchy in your own words.

The approach for week three will be to empower the participants and set the stage for transformative experiences.

Weeks four and five: A two week Bible study on *Women in the Wilderness* will be conducted. The experiences of Hagar will be explained in depth to the women and each woman will be assigned to read the book. The Bible will be the main source and additional materials may be used. There will be sharing and journaling with the women of GHBBC on their experiences as women of God. In this discussion we will talk about how the story made them feel, asking how does it relates to them and what shared experiences did it stir up in them. They will be where do they see themselves as women? And ask where they want to go from here? The purpose for week four is to discover any particular theories that may arise from my findings. The purpose is also to discover any clear signs of a transformative experience.

Week Six: will be used to bring the women to a place of self—help and action. This week will be used to assist the women in their spiritual walk. This seminar will be

conducted by the author. The teaching aid *Living in Purpose by Power Living Consulting* will be utilized. Any additional aids to help the participants to walk with purpose and discover their spiritual gifts will also be utilized. The lecturer will provide a model to help them discover their purpose.

Empowerment Series: *Living In Purpose Seminar by Power Living Consultant.*

▪Defining the Definition for Purpose
What is Purpose?
▪Mapping out your Direction
Where am I going?
▪Taking the Necessary Steps
What is my first step?
▪Your Will
What is God's Will for my life?
▪Putting Things into Perspective
Am I ready?
▪Overview
Walking into your Purpose

The purpose of this week study is to determine common themes, emotions, and display concrete perspectives as well as re-occurring themes and individual discoveries.

Week Seven: A post survey questionnaire will be given in the same manner as at the beginning of the course. The post survey will use an Old and New Testament

scripture. The women will be asked to write their thoughts and understanding of the scripture. They will be given the same pre survey questionnaire with the same questions and some additional questions for the post survey. The measurement of the success of the project is determined if any of these women feel they have discovered their spiritual gifts and/or purpose from being able to interpret scripture in context in which it was presented. It will determine if they recognize their spiritual gifts and/or are limited by the bias of the traditional church setting. The purpose of this study is to look for validation, credibility, and transferability among the participants.

Week Eight: exit interviews will be conducted. Based upon the findings and conclusive evidence the interview questions will be developed within the findings. Each participant will receive the same interview questions and be conducted using a one-on-one interview.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data analysis process includes pre/post questionnaire using the Likert Scale, journaling questions, lecturing and teaching. Sources used for obtaining data will be The New Interpreters' Study Bible, reference books detailing how to exegete scripture, bringing awareness to the bias and oppression of church women, and mis-interpretation of scripture.

My data will be sorted by reviewing the raw data, collecting and categorizing my field notes. The categories will be separated by the questions, the journals, recordings and interviews. The categories will be used to interpret the meaning, the themes and

descriptions. This will be a manual process. The pre-questionnaire will be conducted using the Likert Scale which allows the participants to choose which meaning closely expresses their opinion. The choices will be: strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree or strongly disagree. The post questionnaire will be used in the same manner to measure if there are changes in the perceptions of the participants during the teaching series. The Likert Scale provides a great deal of data for measuring a change of heart.

The interviewer will leave room so each participant will have privacy during their writing. Similar themes will be sought for a sense of understanding each participant had on the questions presented through expressional writings. These responses will be ascertained from the essay questions as well as from their journaling. The data will be used to determine the level and knowledge each participant processed on the topics. These same questions will be presented again the last Saturday before the last Wednesday. Each participant will be given ample time to re-access and answer the same questions to see if there has been any significant changes in their understanding of the material presented. The themes and patterns from the questions will be used as a comparative noting any similar reoccurring themes or significant change of opinions. The comparisons will also be to note any differences in attitude and any perceptions from each participant form the original questionnaire.

The journals will be read and accessed for any measurable change. The raw material will be used validate my hypothesis. I will use the data to look for changes in the tone, impression, depth and emotions from the participants. Reading through this data will give a general idea of what the participants were saying. In addition to the journals

the same process will be used for transcribing the dialogue among the participants and session notes. The interviewing should provide a determination of any re-occurring themes, patterns and data differences. The data will be used in order to evaluate each participant's body language, responses, and emotion during the interview. The indications should show if any of these participants noted any obvious barriers or bias that was presented during their journaling. All the raw data will viewed as individual pieces to understand the larger picture.

The last process will be to analyze the data presented through the exit interviews. The participant's personal experiences will be used as validity and measurement in reference to their barriers to leadership roles. After the data analysis the responses and the reflections on the bible stories will be assimilated. The material will be used to determine and observe the context. This data is critical as it provides the information needed to access if the participants viewed women of the as being oppressed. This information will provide me the opportunity to see what has been learned. The material will be used to see what connections may exist among the women. It will also show any uncommon themes and concerns. The outcomes and responses will be noted for each participant.

The data is separated and coded into categories to describe spiritual gifts, observation of bias, greater understanding of scripture interpretation, minimal change, vast change, or no change. An interpretation will be developed concerning the results. "The purpose of coding is not to only describe but, more importantly, to acquire new understanding of a phenomenon of interest."[6]

Instrumentation for data collection

The qualitative research design will be used for the collection of data for the instrumentation. The instrument used to collect this data will be pre/post questionnaires, the Likert Scale with basic questioning used for journaling purposes and one-on-one interviewing, field notes and observations.

Pre-Questionnaire Likert Scale

The first instrument utilized will be the Likert Scale. The Likert Scale has the advantage because it does not require a simple yes or no answer. The respondent is allowed degrees of opinion or no opinion at all. The data is obtained and can be analyzed with ease. The ten participants will be given the questionnaire at the onset of the session. They will be given about ten minutes to read over and answer the questions. The questionnaires will give credible evidence to the issues presented when bias confronts these women. It will help identify if there any bias generalizations in context. The questionnaire will also give multiple perspectives and assist in developing the themes.

Journaling

The second instrument utilized will be journaling. The journaling will help to interpret lessons learned and cultural/personal experiences. What themes or re-occurring themes present themselves in their journaling? Do they realize or take ownership of any

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[6]B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), 237.

self-oppressive behaviors? Is there evidence of subtle or obvious transformation? Many grounded theories will arise out of journaling.

In *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss state:

> the primary goal of qualitative research is the generation of theory, rather than theory testing or mere description. Theory is suggestive not perfect but an ever-developing entity or process. Strauss notes that one of the requisite properties of grounded theory is that it be 'sufficiently' general to be applicable to a multitude of diverse situations within the substantive area.[7]

Interviewing

> An interview is a list of questions or general topics that the interviewer wants to explore from the participants. It is prepared to make sure that basically the same information is obtained from each person. The interviewer is free to probe and explore within the predetermined inquiry areas. This is to make the interviewing multiple subjects more systematic and comprehensive. The interview can be modified over time.[8]

Interviewing will help the researcher to report without bias. Discourse, reflection and conversation with the participants will present a more reliable consensus of what the true emotions are from the participants. If these findings present a different perspective contrary to the writer's information it will either add to or take away the credibility of the transformative experience. In either case, it will give credibility to the validity or discretization of the author's claims. The interview will be unstructured, open-ended, with audiotape recording and then transcribed.

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[7]Glaser and Strauss, 237.

[8]J. Lofland and L. H. Lofland, *Analyzing Social Settings* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1985), 199.

Qualitative Validity

"Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of the account."[9] I will validate my data by using multiple perspectives to bring credibility to my findings. In order to prove my hypothesis I will use different sources through triangulation. The reliability of my triangulation will be done through case studies. I will utilize pre/post questionnaires, journaling and interviewing. I also will determine my reliability through member checking which will be performed during the exit interviews. The specific reoccurring themes among the participants will provide the major findings. The intimate and familiarity of the church should provide a safe haven. Therefore, the participants will be able to experience the trusted environment of women fellowship. Shared experiences help share the cultural theme and provide for a reliable and realistic exchange of dialogue and information.

The bias the author may bring to the project should not play a diminishing role to the project. The influencing factors being self-reflection and honest narrative will be intentional with the resources used. The focus books were selected to expose the bias the researcher may bring to the study. The criticism to be brought forward in the process allows for honest interpretation from different perspectives.

I will satisfy these criteria by discussing the contradictory information, presenting it in my themes which accounts for realistic and valid findings.

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[9]John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 98.

Credibility

> Credibility is defined as the arguments and the processes necessary for having someone trust research results. Two different types of credible knowledge is internal credibility to the group generating it. The second is external credibility. This is the knowledge capable of convincing someone who did not participate in the inquiry that the results are believable. Conveying this credibility of knowledge to outsiders is a difficult challenge. Members of communities or organizations will find it difficult to accept as credible the objective theories of outsiders if they cannot recognize their connection the local situation or because local knowledge makes it clear that the framework are either too abstract or simply wrong for the specific context.[10]

The context in which I perform my research will be based upon primary sources taken from raw data.

> Another method for auditability is a strategy for the researcher to keep a personal diary and reflect the researcher's thoughts, feelings, ideas and hypotheses generated by contact with the participants. It should also contain questions, problems, and frustrations concerning the overall research process. This will allow the researcher to be aware of biases and preconceived assumptions. That way the researcher may alter the way data is collected and approached if bias is found to enhance the credibility of the research.[11]

Transferability

> When referring to transferability the applicability of the findings is taken into consideration. Applicability refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or with other groups; it is the ability to generalize from the findings to larger populations. Applicability when referring to qualitative research is fittingness or transferability. Research meets this criterion when the findings fit into contexts outside the study situation that are determined by the degree of similarity or goodness of fit between the two contexts. Lincoln and Guba noted that transferability is more the responsibility of the person

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[10]Davydd J. Greenwood and Levin Morten, *Introduction to Action Research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 67.

[11]Laura Krefting, "Rigor in Qualitative Research: The Assessment of Trustworthiness," accessed November 13, 2013, http://ajot.aotapress.net/content/45/3/214.full.pdf.+html.

wanting to transfer the findings to another situation or population than that of the researcher of the original study.[12]

Qualitative research states that the trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability. To insure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial. In order for material to be transferable there must be a genuine trustworthiness in the data presented.[13]

Dependability

Kirk & Miller (1986) describes the reliability of research as thus no credibility without dependability. Since there can be no validity without reliability the former is sufficient to establish the latter. Kirk & Miller states the dependability of the project to the degree to which a measurement, given repeatedly remains the same, 2) the stability of a measurement over time and 3) the similarity of measurements within a given time period.[14]

"Overall, Lincoln and Gaba suggest the dependability of qualitative research is the use of an 'inquiry audit' in which reviewers examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency."[15]

Conformability

Nahid Golafshani, in the article entitled "Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research" states

Lincoln and Gaba (1985) speak to conformability of the research referred to the degree to which the researcher can demonstrate the neutrality of the research

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[12]Krefting.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid.

interpretations, through a conformability audit. This entails providing an audit trail consisting of (1) raw data (2) analysis notes (3) reconstruction and synthesis products (4) process notes (5) personal notes and (6) preliminary developmental information.[16]

[16]Nahid Golafshani, "Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research," accessed November 13, 2013, http://www.nova.edu?sss/QR/QR8-4/golafshni.pdf.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

The purpose of this study was to develop and implement a program to give women the tools to exegete scripture in context, and teach women to overcome biases that they confront in traditional church settings.

Description of Project

The author began the project implementation in the fall of 2013, with the intent of empowering women to read the Bible as a liberating document, rather than potentially feeling disempowered through the process of their own reading. Secondly, the author aimed at providing tools and resources needed by women to interpret scripture, and then help these same women empower other women. The author believed that through the course of the training sessions, the participant women would discover their spiritual gifts, if they had not already done so.

Motivated by these goals, the author put out a call for volunteers of the church to participate in the project implementation. Initially, a total of five volunteers were chosen, and subsequently an additional five were added for a total of ten, in order to provide an adequate sample size, and be able to formulate an accurate hypothesis, based on the size of the church. All ten study volunteers agreed to commit to the eight weeks of training, and additional weeks if needed.

Each participant in the group was provided with a packet containing needed class material for each training session. The initial pre-assessments and survey were administered during the first class, and the same test was administered after the eight weeks of extensive training and study, as a post-test.

Data Collection

The data collection for this project was accomplished through the completion of the survey, to determine any transformations in regards to their initial feelings concerning the topics presented. Each participant also provided essay answers, (used to elicit initial emotions through creative writing) to the assessment questions. The assessment was also used to gain a quick glimpse of each participant's basic understanding of the Bible and/or their personal view of God. As part of their homework assignments, the women were given eight biblical stories, each referencing a woman of the Bible. After the second training session, the women were asked to provide a critical interpretation, or their own explanation, of a biblical story each week. The final method of data collection was one on one interviews, which were conducted with each woman in the same manner.

The first session began with prayer, followed with each participant giving a short biographical presentation, and detailing a few things about her life. Each participant was also given an ice breaker that was used to assist the author in gaining an understanding of each woman in the context of a psychological assessment. (See Appendix B)

Session One

Participant one has been married twenty eight years, but is currently living as a single parent of five children, due to the incarceration of her husband, who has been locked up for a total of three years. She has five children, three boys and two girls, all of whom are grown and living on their own with the exception of her youngest daughter, who is sixteen. She also currently has two grandchildren in her household, who are the children of her second to oldest child. She is now raising these two girls, both under the age of six, because their mother is incarcerated, and their father, her son, is unable to do it alone, although he does assist in providing for them.

Participant two was married within the last ten years, is forty nine years old, and is the parent of two grown girls. Both of her children live out of state, are successful, are married to military men, and have children of their own. Participant two is a supervisor in a factory, where she has worked for over twenty years. She experienced the loss of her mother recently, and also has gained the custody of her nieces' children, two little girls under the age of ten. Her extended family includes three sisters, and a brother. She was raised with two of her sisters. Her other sister and her brother have a different mother, although they all share the same father.

Participant three is a single mother of three boys. All of her boys are active in sports, and two are currently in the process of being looked at for professional football contracts. She is forty eight years old, divorced, just recently broke off an engagement, and works as a pricing analyst at a chemical plant. This participant also just became a recently published children's book author. Participant three does not have any grandchildren. She has four siblings, all of whom have the same father, and all but two

have different mothers. She spends time at the church any time the church doors are open.

Participant four has been married for nineteen years, and describes herself as having four children and "two bonus babies." She works in a management position. She states that she was raised by both parents, though she has had a rocky relationship with her mother because she is closer to her father, who was a truck driver while she was growing up. She is one of four children. Although her siblings share a different father, she is the youngest and the only biological child of the father who raised them. This participant was baptized at the age of thirteen, is a church usher, and is active with the children's ministry.

Participant five is nineteen years old and the youngest of the project volunteers. She graduated from high school in 2012, and is currently starting a dental assistant program in college and is working in a doctor's office full time. She has a son who is sixteen months old and she and the child's father are living together and co-parenting.

Participant six is forty five years old, has one child and was recently married to a man who is a truck driver and has no biological kids of his own. She is a school bus driver, has no siblings, and her mother lives out of state. This participant is a church congregant, and her husband has accepted his calling to the ministry within the last year, which has meant that she has been thrust into the position of being the church's First Lady.

Participant seven is forty five years old, and works as a government employee. She is single with no children, although she spends time with her nieces and nephews,

and is currently in a relationship. She is the second oldest of five children and is active as a church administrator.

Participant eight is a first time, single mother of a five week old son, and she lives with her parents. She is an entrepreneur and is twenty eight years old. This participant is the sibling of Participant seven, and they recently lost their youngest sibling to an asthma attack.

Participant nine is the oldest of the group. She is sixty five years old and is considered the "first lady" of the church. She is the mother of three children and fourteen grandchildren. She worked as a hair stylist back in the 1970's, and also worked at a metal company for thirty five years before she retired. She now does women's ministries, travels, and "just does whatever she pleases." This participant recalls the experiences that she encountered with prejudice when she was younger. She is the youngest of thirteen siblings; five of her siblings have passed away.

Participant ten is single and is a police officer. She was previously a military wife, but has been divorced within the last seven years. She seldom participates in any activities outside of work.

Ice Breaker Activity

As stated above, each participant was given an ice breaker question to answer. The ice breaker questions that were offered are as follows:

1. If your life was turned into a feature length movie, who would play you and why?
2. If you talk in your sleep, what would you say?
3. If you were invisible where would you go?

4. If you could be any animal what would you be?

5. If you were a nationality other than your own which would you choose and why?

Participant one chose question number four as her ice breaker. Her response is as follows:

"I would choose to be a jaguar. It is the fastest animal in the jungle and its distinctive traits makes the animal beautiful. The jaguar is set apart from all others making it extraordinary. The jaguar is hardly ever prey and obviously top of his game."

Participant two chose ice breaker number one. Her response was as follows:

> I would be Angela Bassett in the movie "Waiting to Exhale." I admire how Ms. Bassett's raw emotions were played out in her scenes. When her husband left her the movie showed her pain but it also showed her strengths. She fought and she prevailed. She is my favorite author.

Participant three chose ice breaker question number two. Her response was as follows:

"If I talked in my sleep I am sure I would say "God please keep angels watching over me, my children, family and friends. Keep us safe from all harm and danger." I will say that because I always wake up with my mind staying on God."

Participant four chose question number five. Her response is as follows:

"I guess I would choose Iranian because these women are taught from birth to be submissive to their husbands and to keep the home in order. It is up to the husband to provide and lead his family which should line up with the Bible."

Participant five chose ice breaker question number three. Her response was:

> If I was invisible, I would go get on a plane and take the next flight to Panama. Why I would choose Panama is because my family is always talking about it and how cheap and nice it is to live there. I'll explore all areas just getting a feel for their town and to see if it's something that I can get used to. I will go around eating people food and getting new clothes and shoes. I'll invade in people's house to see how they live and to church to see what a difference their church service is from ours.

Participant six did not offer much in the way of her biographical information, but she chose question five as her ice breaker. Her response was as follows:

> I would choose the question of another nationality. I would definitely be Caucasian because often times white people advance in life merely because of the color of their skin. They have the favor of unspoken privileges whether deserving or not because they feel entitle to whatever their heart desires and so do their counterparts. It is the total opposite for black people. We are first judged by the color of our skin rather their character. I would be much further in life if I was completely white. I am a light skinned African American and I have seen the difference I receive in life simply because of my light skin verses my sisters who are darker.

Participant seven chose question number three. Her response was as follows:

"If I was invisible, I would visit an old plantation home from the inside out every room every inch of the grounds. I would do that because I will be able to take my time and get a true feeling of what my people went through during those slavery times."

Participant eight chose question number one. Her response was as follows:

> Of course I would be Beyoncé in the movie "Dream Girls." She was classy and talented and she made it off her own talent. Although she had some drama in the movie I would have her play me because I like the idea of a woman making her own way and having her own talent.

Participant nine choose question number four. Her response was as follows:

> Oh, I would be a bear. They are big and black and some of them are big and brown. They won't come prey to any animal in the forest and they have the sense

> to go and sleep in the winter and avoid the cold weather. The bear represents strength to me and I admire the way they can stand up on two legs as if they could take on the world. Their strength is admirable and when they roar its something to pay attention to.

Participant ten chose ice breaker question number two. Her response was as follows:

> Jesus wake me if I'm dreaming of better days, but if I am not then let me sleep. I would say this because sometimes I feel we miss the mark in life and I often feel there has to be something more. But at the same time the disappointments make me feel I wish I was dreaming, but then when I realize I am awake I wish God would let me sleep, I rather be dreaming.

This process provided the author with a small window of opportunity to determine the openness each volunteer presented.

The author then assessed the responses of each participant to the ice breaker questions, and these assessments are as follows:

Participant one: The observation identified her need to be present in the situations of life as a participant, but also an overcomer. The author took note in the critical assessment to be mindful of how participant one might respond to God and her perspective of God as creator, and deity over her life.

Participant two: The author's assessment of this volunteer is that she would thrive well in this training. This participant shows signs of being receptive, and being a natural leader. The author believes, based on this assessment, she should be attentive to the patterns that this participant shows emotional concern for, as well as her reactions to the teachings, and be attentive to pulling forth her true feelings.

Participant three: This participant shows signs of being very religious, straight forward and rigid. It appears that Participant three may be invasive and passive at the

same time; she exhibits signs of being very opinionated, and could find this training challenging to her beliefs.

Participant four: Observation reveals that this participant will be transparent, fully active but a traditionalist. This participant shows signs of a very submissive nature, but not very strong belief in women's rights. Her demeanor displays that she could be open to the training, but afraid to step out in the will of God.

Participant five: This participant presents as refreshing and open to learning and teaching. She displays free will, appears receptive to being empowered, and willing to help others. She shows a hunger for life.

Participant six: This participant shows signs of oppression. The author believes she will be receptive to the training. She presents signs of openness, and great potential for critical analysis and learning in reference to the Bible. She is obviously attuned to what it takes to be a leader.

Participant seven: This participant shows emotions towards slavery which indicates her desire to experience the feelings of her ancestors, and foretells her willingness to make a difference. She manifests her heartfelt concern for African Americans in general. The author believes she will be a great asset to this teaching and will be a prodigy as a result of it.

Participant eight: The author's assessment reveals that this participant is fully cooperative with the project, and willing to be open to the process of exegesis and being a leader. She shows special prominence in the exegesis process.

Participant nine: This participant shows her strength and love for God. She reveals a deep and meaningful love for Jesus, and is not easily swayed by the logistics of

exegesis or the process of hermeneutics. Her responses reveal that she is a strong woman of God and has a testimony that will challenge the author when teaching the Bible.

Participant ten: This participant shows her raw emotions towards life and exhibits signs that reveal she is ready for change and will be amenable to the processes of freeing women from any patriarchal ways and oppression.

After the ice breaker activity, the author introduced the session expectations to the group of women. The author explained that the purpose of the trainings were to help women read the Bible as a liberating document. She also indicated the training was three fold, and was designed to help them discover their purposes and empower other women to do the same. The author shared that her expectations were only that the women be present and committed to the process. She identified the similarities among the women in the group and the sensitivity of the women, that the majority of them were single mothers, and that a few of them had never had children and seemingly would never experience biological motherhood. The only question presented by a member of the group was with regard to the issue of confidentiality, and the author assured the women that their personal identities would not be compromised nor would their personal information be shared outside the use of project implementation. (See Appendix A)

Next, the author passed out the pre-test survey, assessment and essay questions. (See Appendix C) The women were given a total of thirty minutes to work on their survey, assessment and essay questions. They would not have enough time to complete all that was required of them, and they would turn in the survey upon leaving class and bring back the assessment and essay to the following session. After discussing the ice breaker exercise and getting a feel for each participant, the author answered any questions

concerning the survey and assessment questions and the class ended with prayer and discussion of any additional questions that the women had. The only question presented was regarding confidentiality and whether the material shared in class would be kept in strictest confidence. I assured the women that they would be identified as participant number and their names would not be used, nor would any information be divulged that might impose upon their privacy.

Session Two

The second class opened up with prayer. Then the facilitator asked that each participant pass forward their assessment and essay questions, and the context associate received that information. After receiving that information, a sample packet was given to each group participant that contained information on exegesis, and the class lesson was taught on the components of exegesis. The following is an outline of the main points taught (See Appendix E):

Guidelines for Interpretation - OT

A. Reliability of Scripture
   1. Torah Bible
      - 22 books
      - Torah (Teaching) Prophets and the Latter Prophets

B. Christian Bible contexts
   a. Orthodox
   b. Roman
   c. Catholic

C. The Greek New Testament

Each participant seemed to grasp the concept, but was a little overwhelmed with the process of exegesis. This is why samples were given in the packets, and biblical

scriptures were provided regarding eight women of the Bible. The participants were advised to take one each week, and practice on their own and in their spare time, reviewing the scripture, then provide their interpretation of those scriptures to the facilitator at the next session.

Participant eight felt that the reading of the bible was of course needed, but asked whether exegesis was really necessary. She stated that she thought the Bible could be read with a critical eye in case there was something clearly not right, but that exegesis was for those who went to school to determine the deep meaning of things of God that "ordinary church folk" may miss. Participant four and participant one were pretty much in agreement with participant eight. They also felt exegesis was invasive and time consuming and asked, "If you are going to pick the bible apart then why read it at all?" Although the participants, like many, did not quote the scripture off the top of their heads, they questioned, "Isn't understanding given by the Holy Spirit?" And they asked what else is necessary. Participant nine and participant three indicated that they felt that if one was being led by the Holy Spirit that brings Christians into understanding, then why was all the "extra stuff" needed? Participant nine was not open to any discussion of finding alternative meanings to the scripture, and participant three stated that she felt it was a good thing to continuously learn and study the bible, but this was over-thinking everything God had written.

Participants two, six, seven and five felt it was ok to study the bible, meditate on the word, and go deeper. They all questioned, however, if it was indeed necessary to go to those extents to find the meaning. They all seemed to agree that an accurate

understanding could be gained by simply reading the scriptures and then just studying that scripture.

Participant ten felt that it was simply unnecessary. Overall, it seemed as if the women had become so accustomed to being taught the word in Bible Study, and simply applying it to current day circumstances, that all exegetical aspects of the scriptures had been lost by tradition and religion. The women clearly were not open to any processes that would cause them to rethink anything that might contradict the word of God and what they believed. The author's observation was that the women clearly had become comfortable, and the intensity of the training had to be pursued with a gentle hand. Based upon those observations, the author decided to direct her teachings more toward the liberation of women, and why it was important to look for the good news of the gospel in every scripture when it came to the women and their personal experiences.

The homework assignment for the second session was based on the biblical study of the woman of the Bible named Eve, Genesis 3:1-16, the fall of man. The purpose of giving the women scriptures was to show women how to properly exegete scripture in context. The goal was to pull out the bias within scripture that may oppress women. The participants were asked to exegete the meaning of scripture through their own interpretations. They then were asked to point out any bias in their journaling that may hinder women. The responses in their journaling were discussed.

Session Three

The session began with prayer. Then the women were given back their survey questions for reference, since survey question number one would be the class focus.

Question one stated, "Do you believe there are valid reasons not to ordain women?" Teaching aids included the following:

A. YouTube Video – Faces of Faith – Ordination Debate

B. Msgr. Charles Pope article – Why Does the Church Not Ordain Women as Priests?

C. Reflection and Response

For a complete outline of week two training aids see Appendix F.

The YouTube video about why women should not be ordained was an excellent choice to open up the closed minds of the women. After the negative response to exegesis, it was important that the author help the women believe that their understanding and view of the Bible was not being criticized. The video was an eye opener regarding what was really going on outside the church walls and with the women of the church. Some of the women's responses were as follows:

Participants one, two, four, five, six and ten all displayed emotions of disbelief and appeared to be appalled at the lack of interest men showed for the feelings of women adhering to their call. Surprisingly, these participants, who had very strong negative feelings concerning exegesis in the prior class, were quickly beginning to sense the need to study the bible in a deeper way in order to gain an understanding themselves. They indicated that in current times, it was hard to grasp the concept that people really felt it was alright for God to use a donkey to speak, but women could not have the privilege to preach.

Participants three, seven, eight and nine were a little bit disturbed. They felt this was nothing new; it was a way of life. These women felt that significant change and growth had occurred in regard to the evolution of women, and the idea of ordination, too,

will just take time to evolve. The author's conclusion from the observations from session two was that each of the women discovered the reason to be accountable for making a greater investment in learning about the Bible. This transformation was not expected by the author, but welcomed. Unexpectedly, the women had opened up to the idea that perhaps they were in need of learning to read the bible with a critical eye in reference to their calling, and their own personal lives. At this point, the author felt comfortable enough to explain more about the topic and why that topic was chosen. She then invested more time in explaining what she already knew of the topic, and why this topic was personally important to them. The "I-Search" strategy was used in partial components to achieve this goal.

> The I-Search (Macrorie, 1998) empowers students by making their self-selected questions about themselves, their lives, and their world the focus of the research and writing process. The strong focus on metacognition—paying attention to and writing about the research process methods and extensive reflection on the importance of the topic and findings—makes for meaningful and purposeful writing.[1]

To address question number one without bias and intentional persuasion, the author decided to introduce numerous different opinions and materials gathered from books and internet sources, to bring forth the class discussion. The purpose was to see if there was consensus regarding biases that affect the participants. The author's purpose was also to attempt to determine if there were any generalizations, or a range of emotions within the context. The author was successful in trying to get the women to be objective; they were now open to hear what the class had to offer.

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[1]ReadWriteThink, "Promoting Student-Directed Inquiry with the I-Search Paper," accessed August 3, 2014, http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/promoting-student-directed-inquiry-30783.html.

The homework assignment for week two included the biblical story of Esther, Chapter 1.

Session Four

The session began with prayer, and then a discussion of Question #2: "Do you believe there is any validity to the writings of Paul based on the questioning of the authenticity of the Pauline letters?"

The outline of the Lesson Plan for Session Four is as follows:

A. Study of the Deutero-Pauline Letters by Felix Just, S.J. PhD.

B. Letters Attributed to St. Paul

C. Undisputed Letters (aka. Authentic Pauline Letters)

D. Disputed Letters (aka. Deutero-Pauline Epistles)

For a complete outline the teachings please see Appendix F:

Question number two was used strictly for educational purposes, to get the women to think about the Pauline letters. The purpose of introducing this teaching was for the women to develop a basic understanding of the letters in order to have a better knowledge of Paul. The intent was for the women to develop a critical eye when reading the works of Paul. The objective was for the women to be able to discern whether they felt that Paul was a supporter of women or not, and for them also to expand their own perceptions and views on the writings which are reputed to be Paul's original works.

As a result of this exercise, each participant reported to have a better understanding of the Epistles. The question that the women raised was with regard to the

fact that when they started looking at the credibility of the writer, then they began to question the credibility of the word. In this regard, the author agreed; this is the reason for the course, i.e., that we may begin to think critically as women and bring the word to life. They had previously not been aware of the conflicting opinions or disputes regarding the question of the authenticity of the letters, until participating in this teaching, nor did they feel prepared to write on this teaching.

The next homework assignment was the Biblical study of Deborah, in Judges, chapters four and five.

Session Five

The session began with prayer, however, from that point forward, the facilitator decided to take a different approach. The women were each given packets containing the Jarena Lee Story prior class. They were all given time to read the story, then journal their feelings and reflections about it, which they turned in at the end of the session. The purpose at this point was to attempt to uncover any major changes in the participants since the beginning of the sessions, and explore reflective criticisms and thoughts. The author's expectation was that multiple perspectives would be present at this point. This session included discussion of question 4: "Do you think the socioeconomic and political aspects of the past bear the infliction of bias towards women of the church today, i.e., inability to vote, seen as subordinate to men, home makers, helpmate, race, gender, class?"

The lesson plan for session five is as follows: *Religious Experience And Journal Of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving An Account Of Her Call To Preach The Gospel.*

The participants' journal entries have been shortened and summarized for educational purposes. The main points are as follows:

Participant one:

In the Jarena Lee story, she constantly ran to the house. Whenever something was wrong, she ran to the house. She spoke of the Lady and how the lady helped her, but she never really made clear reference to me who the lady was, or the particulars of the house. The story was full of emotional highs and lows and the obstacles that she had to face as a woman preacher. It was almost unbelievable at times, the manifestations she encountered through her spiritual journey. She spoke of a time when, for six years, she received the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. I wonder, does that even still happen today? The story made me feel sorry for her; she had a hard life, considering the deaths of her love ones, her sickly children, and her obstacles as a woman preacher. I am more appreciative today of learning about this story, because it gives me a sense of pride in where we have come as women, and the sacrifices and struggles made on our behalf.

Participant two:

The story of Jarena Lee was a real eye opener for me. It made me see how not being properly taught how to exegete scripture and take it in context can be dangerous, in the sense of both our mental and physical state, because it caused Jarena Lee on several occasions to think about suicide. It is very important to have the proper support as women and men when reading the Bible, and to have it explained and taught. Because she had told a lie, she was full of guilt. And then because she read the words from Psalms, this added to that guilt. "Lord, I am vile, conceived in sin, born unholy and unclean. Sprung from man, whose guilty fall corrupts the race, and taints us all." Those words will depress anyone. And after that, she tried to hang herself, but had a supernatural experience of seeing glimpses of Hell. She instead sought the refuge of God, and overcame the urges to commit suicide. I think this story Minister Taylor had us to read was to help us see the importance of having a teacher. I have learned it is important to have a teacher, to understand the scriptures in context and I am now eager to move forward in this process.

Participant three:

For eight years, Jarena Lee had not preached. The time span in which she did not preach makes me believe that there is a time that God might allow you to go through a season of suffering for his will. She said she went through six years of spiritual baptism during that time, but it was filled with five deaths, one being her husband. But after that time she was motivated to go forth and preach. And when she doubted, she had a spiritual encounter, and when a man she had been praying

for died, she saw Jesus on the cross. Every time it seemed she had come to the end of herself and wanted to give up, God intervened. And I gather from the story that if God had not meant for women to preach, wouldn't he have given her over to her suicidal attempts? Wouldn't God have allowed her to succumb to her attempts to end her life, instead of her becoming a trailblazer for women for years to come? I am convinced even more that God is for the woman, and I should pursue my calling even more.

Participant four:

The thing that stood out most for me in this story was her undying thrust forward to find God. It seems to be that Jarena was going through the wails of life and the depression of being set apart. She obviously had a call on her life, indeed a story of trying times that show God does call women to preach. But the part when she realized she needed to forgive was profound. When she showed forgiveness this was God also bringing her out of her ignorance. She, through her forgiving, was part of her conversion. I would think that forgiveness was such a minor part in the eyes of God as long as I submitted. But true forgiveness in my heart seems to be a part of my growth.

Participant five:

She was taken from her parents at the age of seven to be a maid servant. I almost can't wrap my mind and comprehend why a child would be taken to be a servant at such a young age. This story resonates with me because it brings to life the truth and price the older people had to pay for my freedom. I could never imagine anyone I know having to be a servant to any other person. It also showed me that her parents didn't know God, and didn't know how to pray for her. Jarena was troubled by her ignorance of God, and her conscience was touched by the Spirit of God. She found God to be graceful and merciful, even though she didn't know how to find him. And when the lady took her Bible and gave her a novel, she knew enough to refuse it and continue with her Bible. I think my learning experience here was that no matter how lost you are and ignorant you are of God, he is not ignorant of you and his love for you. If you seek him like the word says, he will find you and this is even unto learning.

Participant six:

Ms. Lee was depressed for four years. She stated that "she could never be happy in this life." I have been there. I have felt that way. It was something unsettling that she kept going to drowning to kill herself. It was weird how she kept going to the water for a way of ending her life. Then she decided it was better to hang her self – another alternative but still suicide. I was confused as to what her problem

really was, but I could relate to just being sad because life seems to offer no real happiness. As a woman, as a black woman and as a woman called of God when you didn't seek that calling. I struggle with being a first lady and being a young first lady. But I know if I should turn around the turn would be bitter. Ms. Lee story of her vision of hell to me was her other choice if she should turn from God. But it was really crazy to me that her vision of Satan was a dog. A dog labeled as man's best friend?

Participant seven:

There was great conflict in this story between her battle to be for God, and the clear distractions of Satan. Her experiences with God were described as ecstasy, as if she was in an ocean of light and bliss. The joy was overwhelming and past describing. That is the experience I would like to have with God. But I am wondering if that is because she was called to preach. I know I hear that people called to preach sometimes experience battles that we would not in our mere experience as church congregants will know of. Ms. Lee thought God calling her was Satan because she had read he could transform himself into an angel of light for the purposes of deception. God confirmed her calling and she saw herself as a form of figure in front of a pulpit with the Bible being presented to her. She said after this she never doubted her call again and went forward with perseverance. Her testimony of her life and her story makes me believe that one touch from God can change your life. I want to experience what she is writing about. I want a deeper relationship with God.

Participant eight:

Ms. Lee had a strong spirit of depression on her. She often times thought about suicide but God himself kept saving her. She had dreams, dreams of the people she needed to preach too, dreams when she would be sick and then be well. I am not sure I am convinced that God was doing all this speaking and moving in this one lady life. If so, why doesn't he move like that today? I am curious as to what would cause all of these spiritual baptisms in her life. I feel like the poet who said, Aint I am woman? Should I receive the same type of favor she received?

Participant nine:

I enjoyed the story of Jarena Lee. I felt for her because I am aware at my age of the trails which have befallen the blacks as well as black women who struggled for justice. This was inclusive of the justice of preaching as a woman. I whom went back to school and got my GED and walked with my children across the stage with my children receiving my degree understand the cost to step out on faith. Jarena Lee was fully persuaded that the seeds she had sown were because

> she was called of God. She said the poor labors, awakening and converting sinners was her proof. She spoke of God in her spiritual experiences that he said she shall never return to the cross. I am mixed with the emotions I feel with this and somewhat uncertain of its full context. But I have learned and convinced even the more that perhaps it does not take all of this exegesis and additional thinking, too much learning is not good. Because as she stated she was led by the Holy Spirit with little education and being ignorant of God for much of her earlier years it was the Holy Spirit who led her. I believe it will be the Holy Spirit that will bring us to understanding simply by reading the text.

> Participant ten:
>
> Eight years she had not preached but she was renewed in her spirit. She stood and preached the same text Rev. Allen had preached and during all her traveling and her sickness and going her greatest experience was when she saw the conversion of her son. I think that was another conversion experience that God did call her to preach as a woman. I don't think man has the ability or inquisitive nature to question who is called to preach.

The homework assignment for this session included the biblical story of Sarah, a synopsis from different bible verses, Mother of Nations, and Focus.

Session Six

The discussion question for this session was: "Do you believe questioning any biblical text is inappropriate or unorthodox because it is the word of God?"

The outline of the lesson plan for session six was as follows:

A. Is it Wrong to Question God by Laura J. Bagby
B. The formulation to the Church's Stand
C. Present Stand of the Church
D. Politics in Church
E. Ethnarchy
F. Women's Rights

For a complete outline of the lesson plan see Appendix G. The homework assignment included the biblical story of the Samaritan woman, John 4:1-30.

For this section, I had each participant respond to parts of the document, of their own choosing, in order to be able to address most of the document, and all of our concerns. The participants' responses are as follows:

Participant one:

> Motive. The point made in the article should we question God was very interesting. The points made were are we trying to avoid a command, are we prideful and think we know better than God or just incorrect behavior on our part. But if we really want to know the answer I believe Minister Taylor said if we ask God will reveal even the deep things of God to us. With that being said I guess it's ok to question God with a right heart and right attitude.

Participant two:

> Questioning with a doubtful spirit Gideon in our example questioned God's goodness, power and his promises. In this case is God obligated to answer, because after all isn't this simple doubt? The text to me indicates that questioning God can be a result of delaying our blessings. Like we should just trust God and not question what he allows. The article states we need a right perspective and encouragement. I agree.

Participant three:

> Pharisees. The wrong motive to question God can turn inward and be against us. The Pharisees wanted to prove God wrong. They sought to validate their perspectives on the women caught in the act of adultery. But all are to be so careful. When we get angry and hurt or want to be judgmental over others we have to be careful to ask God to first deal with me. My heart may be wrong or far from God depending on the circumstance. I try and trust God without questioning him because I believe if I trust him he will show me what he wants me to see and in the process answer my concerns.

Participant four:

> My section was on questioning God with an unchanged and unrepentant heart. This strikes me to the core because I was having trouble with forgiveness. That unrepentant spirit and feeling right will make you not forgive people and question God. I think it's ironic that this section would be assigned to me but I see the correlation between it and me. The article say if you acknowledge God as the one being in control and with your best in mind then we shouldn't be afraid to

question God. I think we should be careful not to offend God. But it also say be willing to hear God's answer if you question him. That is a hard pill to swallow.

Participant five:

Listening for God. In order to hear from God I believe we have to be humbled before God. I haven't had many experiences where I have actuality heard the voice of God. There have been incidents where I thought I heard a small comforting voice. I think we need to be taught how to hear from God. I think the Holy Spirit is our conscience, but is that the same as the voice of God? So even if I ask him questions I'm unclear as to when its actuality him answering me back. The Jarena Lee story really confirmed for me how Satan will come in and deceives you and you have to know the voice of God. I think questioning God is ok, but how do I hear?

Participant six:

The Bible. Asking for understanding requires spending time in the bible. We all in this class seem at fault for this one. The article says we must sit calmly at the feet of God, we must be prayerful. A lot of times I am guilty of not seeking God's face but I want an answer. It doesn't seem logical when I stop and reflect on my actions. I don't think it's anything wrong with asking God for wisdom. It's back up in scripture, James chapter 1.

Participant seven:

Wanting our way. We are humans and tend to want what we want when we want it. A lot of times add at whatever the cost, we want it. I think this is why we question God, when things don't happen the way we want. It is in our nature as humans to get upset and get angry with God. But I think its ok to question God just don't question him with a haughty nature. God gives and God take away. He should be respected at all times.

Participant eight:

Tradition and questioning God. I think traditions are necessary because where would we be without them. But when it comes to questioning God tradition and older Christians have taught us not to question God. Except the word I'm learning critical observation is good. I think questioning God is a humbled way keeps us grounded. It's almost like how can you learn if you don't ask questions. The bible does say my people perish because of flack of knowledge, God doesn't want us

ignorant. I think it's ok to question God and learning to read scripture in a liberating way is a good thing.

Participant nine:

Maybe questioning God is blasphemy? I have a topic that is difficult to approach but I will do my best. Blasphemy as we know it is to deny the Holy Spirit. In questioning God we question that authority to some degree. I think we exhibit signs of doubt, maybe confusion. I do not believe in questioning God. I don't believe questioning him is blasphemy either.

Participant ten:

Questioning God is a sign of disbelief. I think to some degree doubt is a form of disbelief. I think it does not discredit us in God's eyes because it is a part of life. The point is to grow and to learn and like everything else we will have doubts. The good part about being curious is you seek the face of God for the answers. That is why I don't believe it is a bad thing. If it makes you seek God then it is a great thing. God always wants our conversations and prayers and I think he would be glad we sought him however we did instead of going to our own devices.

The homework assignment for Week 6 was 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Session Seven

The purpose of this study is to bring forth conclusive evidence and findings that support the credibility of the project. The materials have been developed to support the transferability, credibility, and dependability of the project for future reference. The discussion question for this session was: Do the stories of the women in the Bible leave you feeling uplifted and loved by God, or downtrodden and saddened by the experience of the character?

The outline of the lesson plan for Session Seven follows:

Study of the book, *Sisters In the Wilderness* by Delores S. Williams, and a bible study:

A. Genesis 16: 1-6 Hagar's predicament and Genesis 21: 9-21 God's response to Hagar

B. The negative portrayal of black women

C. The wilderness experience

D. Naming black women's experience

E. Defining patriarchy

F. "Womanist" reflections

For a complete outline of the lesson plan see Appendix F.

The participants' responses to the above discussion question, after a two week extensive bible study on Hagar and the book entitled, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, were as follows:

Participant one:

> I absolutely hated this read. Hagar is displayed as some victim trapped by life circumstances and God made her go back to her abuser. To me this justifies the abuse women embrace today and no one stops to say this isn't right. The author uses this book to stereotype all black women by saying this is our experience. This is not my experience. The entire book to me display women of color as victims, poor black women and what we have to endure because of the color of our skin. There is too much negativity in this book. The slavery, poverty, ethnicity, sexual and economic exploration and all the other negative annotations she used in this book disgusted me.

Participant two:

> I hated this book. I think it was a poor choose when Minister Taylor explained this course as a way of reading the Bible in liberating eyes. There was nothing liberating about the Hagar experience. God to me didn't even deliver her and in the book it states that he showed her the way to survival. It also says over and over in the book about black women looking for God to make a way out of no way, we do this. We do turn to God and he has been our way maker, our bridge over trouble waters but so much of this book talked about the connection between the black women and Hagar. These are not all our experiences and I can't go back in times of slavery and resonate with being the mistress. I think she spent too much time in the past on mammie and mistress and making the connection to why

we as women are not a lady that she missed the part that we are very much ladies in this current day.

Participant three:

I have mixed emotions about the book. I can understand the author's intent to write about the struggles of the black women. I can also understand her trying to bring the resemble of Hagar to the African American women. Black women do struggle and carry the burden of the households today as single mothers. We do make up the majority of the church and cry out to God in our wilderness. But what if I was not a mother? What if I had not the experience to know what it means to be nurturing and had been robbed of that gift from God? I feel that she spent too much time and energy on the suggoracy of the black women and being a mother. She loss me when she spent so much of the book talking about mammie and suggoacy. This is not my experience although I understand her intent. Where is my story? I have had the benefits of walking out of mammie's shoes; I have had the benefit of not always being a single parent with a good support system and co-parenting from my son's fathers. I have a good job and have not been raped. I have acknowledged that God will deliver me and not give me a survival plan, but will simply deliver me. Hagar is an example to whom? Not me. She is just a reminder of the struggles in which a black woman undergone with her will to fight back in unfortunate situation. Hagar story does not impress me; it does not even resonate with me. I just understand Hagar's plight of being black. That is why my emotions on the book are mixed.

Participant four:

I hate to be direct, but I think Hagar was out of line. I think she was just plain stupid. She brought the problems upon herself simply by not being submissive. She overstepped her line. I think the book was interesting and I can't say whether I enjoyed it or not. The book particularly did not catch my attention until we began to simply try and define our wilderness experience. We do go through things as black women that white people in general will never understand, they may relate out of human compassion. But Hagar shows me sometimes all these stories about slavery, about where we have come from when its constantly showing how we were mistreated and beaten and used does not bring a thankfulness in my soul that I'm not there anymore. It angers me that we are still being reminded of how far we are still to go in order to be realized we too are the images of God. If we were not experiencing that same racist behavior, that same bias, that same sexism then I would be thrilled to look back but where am I looking back to. As black women we are still in our wilderness experience.

Participant five:

I didn't like the book. I like the Jarena story better because she showed an example of that liberation Minister Taylor spoke about. Hagar was depressing. It made me feel bad after I read it. It seems to me the entire outlook of the black women in Hagar's eyes was negative. Where was God in all this? And if you look at the story and how black women are described and what they go through we are rightfully to ask now where is God? The sad part about Hagar is she was told to go back into her oppression. The book talks about different aspects of the wilderness experience for women but overall I think it showed that not only do men have a hard time explaining the black women, all women are not qualified to speak for all women either.

Participant six:

I enjoyed the book immensely once we got past all the Hagar talk. That part I did not enjoy. The Hagar story was not one I would have enjoyed reading on my own. God seemed absent and Hagar only showed the struggle of being a single mother and feeling God had taken the side of the oppressor. When our Bible study got to the shared experiences as women, and talked about God and who he was to us and the cross I began to fall in love with the book. I think beginning with some of the dialogue makes the book a good book. I got a lot of knowledge from Minister Taylor on what the cross means for us as black women. It was Jesus way of righting what was wrong and it is our responsibility to continue on that path in search of justice. I think from this study I am clear on my love for God and my strength as a black woman.

Participant seven:

I enjoyed the Bible study very much. It was informative and I learned so much about womanist theology. I was angered by some of the stories told in the book in reference to how white people treated black people. I was angered about the mammie stories, the blacks being labeled idiots and lunatics, and on and on. But once we got past all that I was able to enjoy the rest of the book. I remember a part where it said something like "only the redeemed men can serve as agents of reconciliation."[2] To me how can I move forward if I am continuously in my anger and bitterness of what was done to me in the past? So I was glad when we moved forward in our study. I am not waiting for white people to give me validation or walk on equal footing with them. I am walking with all races and I believe black theology was the way to open the door for womanist theology.

Participant eight:

I felt overwhelmed. The emotions of Hagar and her struggle overwhelmed me. I felt burdened by the reality of what we as black women still go through. It is such a sad picture. But it brought to the forefront the shortcomings we face as a church. There needs to be more analysis on the situations women face as black women in the church. Sunday after Sunday we sit in the pew but what changes for us? Does anyone hear our voice? Are we dealing with the teenage pregnancies, the single mother's plight, the abuse the preachers impose upon the women leaders because they can. I think I am empowered and stronger because of this Bible study. The time was limited but I will continue to journal about my experiences and go back and reflect on this book until I feel content to say I'm there. There being the place where I will feel comfortable to make a difference because I have so much knowledge now to do so.

Participant nine:

The book was ok for me. I can't say that I enjoyed it or didn't enjoy it. The realities of slavery and oppression were real then and it's real today. I think we as women have to face those realities. I think it is good to have women writing about these things and trying to define the black women's experience. The church has not failed us or did us wrong, the church is our saving grace. Without it we would not know of God's grace. Too much emphasis is put on defining who we are as women, I think we should just be. Continue to walk in integrity as women of God and pray for change to progress. I thank God things aren't like they used to be. I sort of understand after the Bible study where Minister Taylor might have been going with this book of choice. But I think her strength was shown in bringing a different array and light to all the topics presented. I think she did an excellent job with this Bible study and I look forward to future teachings with her. Even with me she taught me valuable lessons on womanist theology, and a different way to look at the cross and in the end I felt more liberated.

Participant Ten:

I felt like I was reading two different books, the first part was sad and made me angry on how Hagar was treated and black women's experience all around. I can relate to the struggles Hagar experienced and my heart went out to her. The second part of the book was a lot of good information. I learned so much about the church and the thoughts of woman theologians. I really enjoyed the Bible study. I felt equipped after having reading the book and learning the story that I definitely can help other women.

For a complete outline of the lesson plan see Appendix F. The homework assignment for this session included reviewing the Biblical story of Mary Magdalene.

Session Eight

In this session, the following questions were explored with the participants: "Do you feel like you have discovered your spiritual gift and purpose? Do you feel empowered to help other women discover their spiritual gift and purpose?"

Lesson Plan:

Empowerment Series: Living In Purpose Seminar by Power Living Consultant.

▪**Defining Purpose**
What is Purpose?
▪**Mapping out your Direction**
Where am I going?
▪**Taking the Necessary Steps**
What is my first step?
▪**Your Will**
What is God's Will for my life?
▪**Putting Things into Perspective**
Am I ready?
▪**Overview**
Walking into your Purpose

Participant one:

In order for anything to function right it has to be ordained by God. God will stir up the gift and make room for our gifts. But we have to accomplish the task before us. If we don't know our abilities we need to ask God and he will show us. No matter what our beliefs are you have to look at the source in order to grow and learn. We tend to live stressed out lives with no direction and little peace. We then become both unsuccessful in both career and professional life. I believe living in purpose seminar is life changing for me and it begins with knowing how to read the Bible as a liberating document.

Participant two:

I think beginning to know myself is a beginning to becoming intimate with the word and learning how to read it. I believe what I'm trying to say is if I know myself then I can figure out what God has for me in my life. I can feel confident in what I feel he is leading me to as my purpose. All of us settle down with what we feel is opportune at the time. All of us go to work day in and day out and sometimes feel purposeless. Now I feel like I have some direction and my purpose have more definition.

Participant three:

My purpose is to try and give some helpful information that changes the course of other lives. I hope to show and accomplish the positive and important things in my life. I want to achieve those things and have a balance personal and career life. It's not simple, but I think if I submit to God's will and just follow the Bible I will achieve my goals. Again, I think the Bible does not need changing any or all this refiguring, I think we just have to be submissive.

Participant four:

I have enough to do list in my life without adding more. The seminar was excellent to me but it felt like it added more to my plate. I feel encouraged and 90% clearer on my purpose but I think I'm frustrated that coming to church or reading the bible adds another task to my life. Exegesis seems another struggle, but we pretty much can't get anywhere without proper steps. I think I am open to all that this session has to offer and I am glad that this training had scriptural backing.

Participant five:

I loved the part about being positive. Minister Taylor said the first thing to do is to think differently. She then said positive thinking will bring about positive actions. And if you ever heard anybody say if you think of it this way then you will see it differently. I completely agree it is the way we think! I believe it and know I know I can achieve my purpose. I know what my purpose is now but I didn't know before this training because she gave a step by step process. I am so glad I did this training session. I know now I have to be challenged and come out of my comfort zones. We find out we are more afraid of failure than we know and allow our subconscious mind to believe in that faire. We then become vulnerable and get stuck. I'm not stuck anymore, I feel like I'm ahead of the game now.

Participant six:

Living in purpose seminar was excellent! I will meditate on these words and I will remember that successful and purpose is rightfully mines. I believe that this training was the icing on the cake. Minister Taylor did not leave us empty and wondering where to go from here after she presented the issues to us, she gave us direction. This applies to both our personal and career lives. This is my life and my happiness and I have a lot to say what happens with it. I did not know that I had this much control and had not attributed reading the bible and my purpose was so closely intertwined until now. Well correction, it is one in the same.

Participant seven:

I learned in this seminar and my reflections are stop letting potential go to waste. And if I can do something to empower myself and others then I should be doing that. Everyone has something they can do. Even if you like it and not good at it try it anyway. A lot of time you have nothing to lose. If you have a talent and don't use it God can take that talent away and give it to someone who will be faithful over it. When you angry and frustrated don't give up, work even harder. Every day it gets harder you make another plan and just reevaluate that vision.

Participant eight:

Of course my favorite part was taking control of your life and the decision you make and taking control of our emotions. And not to let your emotions control you. We have all the strength through God who strengthens us. Sometimes things happen uncontrollable but it's up to us how we react. We have to be motivated, we have to be positive. We have to be determined. Yes, we all agreed that life is hard and the sisters in the wilderness book was a hard pill to swallow, but I realize how important that information is and why we need to know these things. We are

> not to dwell there though, we have to let go and let go of negative energy and situations. That includes negative people too and comfort bias that we face as women.
>
> Participant nine:
>
> I enjoyed the seminar. I agree with you have to be focus and committed. I believe women do have a purpose from God. In order to discover that purpose we do have to have a plan and a sense of direction that begins with the word…, I admit that perhaps the bias and patriarchal control could have some effect on the women in the church. My opinion and reflection after this teaching is that perhaps it won't hurt to be critical of the word to a small degree. But I still believe simply by reading and meditating on the text the Holy Spirit can give you all you need to know and even your purpose in your life. I do not have anything against anyone who wants to do better, be more encouraged and do better for Jesus.
>
> Participant ten:
>
> I loved the part when she gave the scripture from Habakkuk 2:2-3; to write the visions and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. I don't think I ever read that or seen it in the bible and that did something good for me. It is hard for me to explain but it made me feel encouraged and good on the inside. I know we can go back to the word and when it's explained and in context it can set the captives free like the bible says. I see oppression in such a clearer way and I think I see my purpose now. I'm still a little unsure but I feel so much stronger than when I first began this class.

For a complete outline of lesson plan see Appendix F. The homework assignment for this session was Romans 16.

Session Nine

Lesson Plan Nine: The purpose of this study session was to determine common themes, clear emotions, and present concrete perspectives, as well as explore re-occurring themes and individual discoveries. The discussion question for the first portion of this

session was: "Do you contribute to the violence against women indicative of the truth about patriarchy?"

A brief outline of part one of the lesson plan was as follows:

A. Violence against women

B. Prevention and Response

The participants' responses were as follows:

Participant one:

I've never experienced physical violence from a man but I have experienced the violence that come with being a woman. Being sexually abused and degraded and all the forms that comes with abuse. I do believe looking back at the lesson from Sisters in the Wilderness that our past has caused a lot of the patriarchal problems we deal with today. But the problem I believe is the church should have done more, do more. When it does not preach on the violence and the abuse women face. It is terrible.

Participant two:

The training on the violence against women makes me realize what a universal problem it is. I think that the violence starts as early as in preschool when little girls are teased or looked over by other friends if you look different. As little girls, as women appearance is a big part of who we are and the damages if done early will affect us the rest of our lives. I think that not having a strong biblical foundation and being able to read the scriptures with a liberating view we fail. We fail to realize we are made in the image of God and patriarchal views run rampant and it affects us as African American women. We deal with it in the work place, in our homes, in our schools, in the community; we do not get equal opportunity because we are women and two because we are black women.

Participant three:

I hate abuse, I hate that women are beaten and killed at the hands of love ones. The violence is overwhelming and it's a sad situation. But I believe the word is the word. I don't think that the word is short in any way; I don't think it can be mis-interpretated. I don't believe patriarchy is a problem in the church. I think we as women have to learn to be submissive and learn to fall under the leadership of men because that is who God happen to choose to be over us. I don't have a problem following a man of God and I think we as woman have to learn to do that

and God will open doors for us to do the things we want to do. But we need to be submissive.

Participant four:

I know abuse is real. I think it's a world-wide epidemic. I think that women who are in that situation do not want to be in that situation. They just not strong enough to get out of it sometimes. I also think that a lot of times as women we have to learn to be women of God. Sometimes we need to just be quiet and go pray. I understand patriarchy and I think it's wrong to keep a woman from walking in her purpose. I do not agree with abuse. I just think that it's so much more to the story. Its two sides to every story. Once you see you are in an abusive situation, leave no excuses. Now, if the Bible has contributed to women staying because the word says don't divorce, or whatever I do believe that is wrong. But it is up to the preacher to make sure he explains that abuse is not acceptable and maybe more bible studies to help women interpret scripture and read it as a liberating document needs to be continuous.

Participant five:

I haven't seen abuse or experienced it in my life time. I know that it starts early. In high school I know that there were girls who were scared of the guys they were with. I am not too sure why, but I figure some type of controlling and abuse may be involved. And if these girls loved themselves or had higher self-esteem I think they would not put themselves in that situation. I think the bible and more teaching to help women read the bible as a liberating document will help girls gain positive self-esteem and be able to avoid situations like these that will be harmful. I think that the negative views and bible stories about the women in the bible will after a while affect you. Just like Jarena Lee when she read those depressing scriptures, felt what happiness can I find in this life. Sometimes the Bible can make you feel like nothing but only if you can't see God in the story. This is what I think we need help with and received help with in this session.

Participant six:

Abuse was a part of my history. My ex-husband hit me and the last time he hit me I left and never looked back. Abuse is a sensitive topic for me but I never contributed it to the bible. I never looked at abuse or patriarchy as a form of abuse. But I guess it is some type of sin because it is not doing as God wills. When you use your advantage as the men of God to keep women in a place of submissive that keeps them from reaching God in their full potential it is abuse. Women need to be able to be free in church and not be limited to the views and opinions of men when it's not bringing freedom but oppression.

Participant seven:

I think abuse of any kind is unacceptable. I also think that if the church would help women read the Bible as a liberating document and help defend the character of some of these women that girls would grow up stronger and more prideful of what they are. But if they continue to see all these stories in a negative light how can they feel good about themselves or believe God loves us as women. We already have dealt with slavery, and now we deal with abuse, and now we deal with the church. African American woman constantly fighting for someone to validate us as children of God. I think it's time we validate ourselves.

Participant eight:

I can't imagine some of the situations or the statics of abuse amongst women. I do think the church has a lot to do with why women stay in abusive marriages or situations. I do believe the church has a lot to do with girls not knowing their worth. I believe that if our mothers don't instill the value of our worth inside us we too would be loss. The Bible often times does not paint a pretty portrait of the women and I didn't realize that at first. But now, I recognize that there is work for us to do and I am a willing participant.

Participant nine:

I have seen abuse as a child, as a woman and have experienced different forms of abuse. It was not until I got older that I realized that God is a feeling and real God who does not want us to stay in abusive situations. But it was not because the church taught me and the church educated me on those things, it was God's grace. I agree some more education can be offer in light of abuse but I believe a woman of God will not find herself in that situation if she learns to be submissive and just pray to God. God will change things and prayer works. I understand patriarchy plays a part but I don't think it's enough to blame the bible for the sins of men.

Participant ten:

Abuse is a large problem. Working in law enforcement I am all too familiar with the problems and the cases of domestic violence. I often times wonder what takes these women so long to leave, to do something. But when you go back and look at history and the things the black woman continues to endure it's almost like breaking bad habits. Who can tell her it's not her fault? Who can convince her it wasn't what she said or didn't do? It's in our blood; it has been embedded in us. Mammy, the slave, the mistress, the one who is used over and over again because woman was made for man and that entitles man to do what he wills with our lives.

There are oppressions that have to be broken from years and years of happening to us as African American women.

For a complete outline of lesson plan see Appendix F. The homework assignment was to review the Biblical text of Phoebe.

The lesson plan for part two included the following assessment questions:

1. How do you view God? What experiences have shaped that perception?

2. Describe God in your own words.

3. Write your own definition of oppression. Have you ever experienced oppression?

4. What does empowerment look like to you as a woman? In the church? Outside the church?

5. What is exegesis? What is hermeneutics?

6. Define patriarchy in your own words.

The participants' journal responses were as follows:

Participant one:

I view God as the Almighty. That means above everyone and everything on this earth. He is Alpha and Omega. I view him as my Lord and Savior. The experience that have shaped that perception is when you look back and be amazed at the timing when he stepped in and you knew it was no way possible that could have happened if it wasn't for a higher power. God is all knowing. God is not jealous. Oppression is suffering. Oppression is cruelty and forcing wrong views on someone. I personally have never felt oppression. Empowerment look like me as a woman as respect. Being recognized for your works and things you have accomplished. In the church it looks like your title that you hold, whether it be a minister, choir member, nurse, music director, deaconess, it's what make you feel important. Exegesis is an interpretation of a text. Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation, especially biblical texts.

Participant two:

I view God as the alpha and the omega. He's the creator and the head of my life. He everything to me. Being raised at a young age to know who God is changed my life for the better. Dealing with life's up and downs and everyday situations is

what draws me closer to God. God is an awesome God. The world and making a difference. Having a voice for God. Being a teaching and being who God created you to be inside or outside the church walls. Living up to Gods expectations of who he created me to be. Trying to help bring someone to get to know Christ. Helping show love and share the word of God with someone to change their lives. Exegesis is draw in. Hermeneutics means different views concerning the bible. Patriarchy is when the man is the leader and gives authority and control.

Participant three:

I view God as absolute. He is everything. Everything we experience, see and feel is God. I feel this way because of my life experiences. Things that happen in my life when I know it could have only been God who made a way out of no way. Or when there was sickness and all of a sudden I'm well but the doctor doesn't understand how. God is just awesome to me. He is a kind God. He is my everything and my source. To me God is indescribable and these are only guesses of what he looks like in my mere imagination. He is so much more. Oppression is when you feel trapped and unable to be yourself. I have experienced oppression on my job and when seeking job opportunities. Empowerment to me is strength, having the will to push through when circumstances aren't favorable to your liking but you push through and overcome. That is empowerment to me. And as a woman of the church it means helping others and outside of the church it means helping others. Exegesis is interpreting scripture in context. Hermeneutics is the study of biblical interpretation. And I think Patriarchy in my own words is bullying.

Participant four:

God is our creator—Alpha and Omega the beginning and the end. How on earth would I have made it through life? When I look back over my life wow….Teenage years to the outside looked great but, living in the house where my father was a long distance truck driver and rarely home. Thank the lord my Mother and siblings looked out for me and made sure I had wanted I needed and a lot of what I wanted. I delivered (1) very healthy baby girl, survived a miscarriage and then delivered a not so healthy baby girl (praise God he kept us and she is a super spit fire now)…it could ONLY been God on my side. Raised to "bonus" babies to the best of my ability and didn't hurt anyone in the process!!! Job opportunities with no college degree (with God I can go to the board room of a major cooperation and not break a sweat OR I could go to the McDonald's in the hood and be that shining light to another young lady to let her know that she too could MANAGE the McDonald's), a marriage that is not perfect but, perfect enough to keep us together for almost 19 years (Praise God). God is alpha and omega. There is none like him in all the earth. I love my husband but, God is the head of my life. God is our sustainer and through him all things are possible if

you choose to believe. Cruel or unjust use of authority or power. Being an African American we are oppressed ALL the time. I truly feel our African American brothers are oppressed are than woman. Maybe not directly because this country is designed to be crafty, regarding oppression. Most of my experiences come from the work place. My white female counter parts will get promotions and special treatment for their offices while I have to jump through hula-hoops and do cartwheels to receive the same benefits. We (African Americans) always have to go above and beyond the call to receive recognition or support. My other experience was trying to get an insurance check cashed for my husband. Three SunTrust banks in the Richmond area turned me away because I didn't have an account with SunTrust. But, God had a ram in the bush because one of my good friends is white and trust and believe she walked into a SunTrust on the West End of Richmond with no identification or an account and got the check signed, no questions "here you are Mrs. Caple." You tell me is that OPPRESSION or NOT!! I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Empowerment is being 1 of 3 African Americans Managers out of (30) white managers in my area and all of the African American offices are in the top (5) that's empowerment. In the church, when a plan comes together for special events or programs and all of the women working together as a team and the event is a hit! That's empowerment. Bringing home a pay check to contribute the household, giving birth and taking care of your children and being able to MULTI-TASK like no other human being on earth AND keep it all together with a smile…that's EMPOWERMENT. Exegesis=explanation or interpretation of texts, especially religious writings. Hermeneutics=the science of interpreting text. Patriarchy=Social system in which men dominate-men are regarded as THE authority within family and society. My husband is the head of my household and I am his help mate. God created women to be a man's help mate! Not the head of men. We (women have to stay in our lanes and submit no matter how hard it may be that's the way God intended.

Participant five:

I view God as great. I think he is all knowing and perfect. I think he is unable to sin or fail. That perception is found in my belief that God controls everything. I think God is just and merciful. I know he is full of grace because we all would be dead and gone if he wasn't. I have experienced oppression. When my father was locked up and I had no way to help him, the pain made me feel oppressed. Empowerment to me is being successful in the things you desire to do in life. In the church empowerment is following the call has on your life and outside the church it is being kind to others. Exegesis is learning how to read scripture. Hermeneutics is learning how to read scripture correctly. Patriarchy is unjust rule of men.

Participant six:

I view God as perfect. I think he is good. I perceive this because he gives me chance after chance even when I mess up. I think oppression is almost like being locked up in prison. You are not free to live and roam as you please because you are limited by things that bind you in life. I have experienced oppression. Empowerment looks like to me as overcoming. Overcoming those things that should have killed you but you make it instead. In the church I think it looks like encouraging those to overcome and doing the same things you do in the church outside the church. This means not being a fake person. I think exegesis is interpreting the word and hermeneutics is interpreting down with certain steps. And I think patriarchy is when men rule over women and the majority of control is by men.

Participant seven:

I view God as the source of everything on earth! I came to know about Jesus as a young child when my parents had bible study with us and through their teachings I found Jesus for myself. I have had experiences as far as getting prayers answered and a wonderful cleansing of my soul. God to me is a huge spirit and a priceless wonder that leaves you in awe! Oppression is a person place or thing that can control your life. You can become oppressed in your feelings if someone is not treating you right. Even a place which can be your place of work or your home can make you oppressed. You can find yourself in the same old situation time and time again and it becomes habit and you find yourself stuck. I have experienced oppression before and God is the only one that can truly get you out of your situations. Being a woman empowerment looks like "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". You have to encourage yourself and believe that you are able to do great things even though society looks at you different being a woman. In your church you have to stand your ground and allow God to use you for his will. This also means that you carry into the world to be the best you can be. Exegesis is a critical explanation or interpretation of a religious text. Hermeneutics means the theory of text interpretation, especially the scripture. You often hear that Patriarchy is for older people especially a male. To me Patriarchy can be anyone that stand strong and keep the family together so to speak. I have had people tell me that I am the Patriarch of my family.

Participant eight:

I view God as the controller of my life. I think when I am on the wrong path he straightens me with a gentle hand of love and helps me realize my mistakes. God is controller of my life, is he is gentle and not a mean God. I think God is the best friend I ever had. Oppression to me is having my will taken away from me by force. I have experienced oppression when I feel used and unappreciated.

> Empowerment to me looks like integrity. To be a person of good character makes you powerful I think. I think the church is the same thing and outside, just being a person of good character and integrity. Exegesis, I think means learning the scriptures in the time it was told and I think Hermeneutics is evaluating that situation critically. Patriarchy is control over people through manipulation.

Participant nine:

> I view God as creator. I view God as just and powerful. These perceptions have been shaped by the experiences that only God could have delivered me from. Oppression to me is other people's cruel intentions and acts towards you that prohibit you from being free in your spirit. I have experienced oppression plenty of times through racism. Empowerment looks like being a virtuous woman. In the church and outside the church. Exegesis is something I am not too sure about or in agreement with but I guess its breaking down the scriptures to get a better understanding. Hermeneutics is looking at the text from different angels. Patriarchy is being influenced by the views of men.

Participant ten:

> I view God as all present. I view him as the head of my life. These perceptions are because I have seen him perform what I call miracles in my life and my family life. Oppression to me is being shackled and locked up. I have experienced oppression. Empowerment is being able to be the women God ordained you to be, whether it preaching, singing or whatever. Empowerment is carrying that gift outside the church to help others. Exegesis is going deeper into the word. Hermeneutics is a deeper study in the word. And patriarchy to me is being controlled by men.

Focusing the Analysis

The pre-questionnaire was used to establish initial findings regarding the group's spiritual assessments. The questions were used to validate the themes or patterns that were exhibited by each participant. The author sought to answer several questions regarding the participants, such as: Did they all display signs of oppression? Did they each have a common perception in response to any particular questions? Or did they even exhibit the ability to recognize bias that often occurred in the church? After the teachings

and empowerment sessions, each participant was asked to journal their responses to the day's events through reflection and critical observations. In the journaling, the author sought evidence of underlying beliefs and understanding of the theories presented. Specifically, the author sought to answer questions such as: What were their comments, critical analysis or findings from the teachings? What were their shared experiences? Is there any validity to their observations and the authors' findings? Again, each woman was to journal their reflection, response and critical observations in reference to the focus. Each tool was broken down into an organizational structure to describe the effectiveness and validation of each.

This same format was used for ten weeks. On the last week, the Saturday exit interviews were conducted by the author. (See Appendix I). The initial findings of the Ice Breaker activity are as follows:

I read through the data from the pre-questionnaire, and noted the responses given by the participants. (See Appendix D) The question I looked for an answer to was in reference to the stance the participants took with regard to the questions presented to them. Their answers in the form of the Likert scale allowed me to determine if these women sensed, felt or recognized any bias within the church. Some of the questions would indicate if the women understood the Pauline Epistles. Next, I formulated any ground theories, such as whether they believe in women being ordained. I wanted to test whether they believed any outside influences affected the development and progress of church women. My most pressing question was whether they believed in, and recognized their own gifts. These issues were considered in regard to the questions presented to the participants.

First data findings using the Likert Scale

The findings were surprisingly disturbing. The women whom I had worked with for many years presented a very passive stance. Participants one and three had no opinion on the ordination of women. A common theme presented itself when the responses of all participants showed they had no opinion concerning patriarchy. The majority of their answers contained no opinion. Participants three and four did give different responses to the Likert Scale which indicated these women both felt that the outside influences did play a part in the bias within the church. Six out of the ten women were not sure if they had discovered their gifts, but all of them felt they were able to empower other women within the church setting. All of the participants felt that violence against women was not indicative of the truth concerning patriarchy.

Second data findings using the assessment questions

The data from the assessment questions suggests a lack of interest and/or knowledge among the participants concerning the context in which oppression and patriarchy are used. The women all showed commonality in that they described God using his characteristics and referred to the attributes of God's character; God was kind and loving. However, it was not clear to the author exactly who God was to the participants. In addition, the women described empowerment as accomplishments. Participant three asserted empowerment through the submission of her husband. Oppression in the text for all women was described in the form of dictionary terms, and participant four describes that she has never knowingly been oppressed in her lifetime. Overall, the women's responses to these assessments were very much alike. They also

described Patriarchy as the subordination to men and men taking authority. The response was limited and did not give a very in depth explanation to patriarchy and the church. The women were vague and very passive in their responses to the assessment questions.

Third data findings using exegesis of Biblical text

Participants found no real bias in any of the biblical text. The participants did show a pattern of revering men as the head, with authority over the woman. Participant four's partial responses show a little concern for the hierarchy of men. She stated, in response to 2 Samuel Chapter 11 (Bathsheba), "Men ask to get what they deserve, whether wrong or right, plotting or scheming. Using their power to gain control of what they want. I don't see any bias toward Bathsheba, she was not forced. It doesn't say that, it says he sent for her and she went willingly. She knew her actions were wrong because she was purifying herself from her uncleanness which meant she felt dirty afterwards." Participant four stated her displeasure with the actions of men, and she ended her response by mentioning that Bathsheba felt dirty. Yet, the Biblical text did not indicate any bias that Bathsheba encountered in the face of this opposition.

Participant two and participant three had similar responses to the Biblical interpretation for question eight. Participant three was careful not to "rock the boat." All of her responses were superficial and preachy. There was no transparency in any of the women's responses. Participant three's responses were as follow:

> After reading certain passages concerning women in the bible I think that God's purpose is for women to be helpers. The man is the head and women were created to assist him. All these things were done to humble women so that the man will be the leader. They had to watch what they said and how they spoke. They had no opinions or voices and were looked upon as lesser than man. Women were not meant to be fighters or leaders. We are more care givers. They more had to be

> supporters for man and had no voice. They had to stay in their places and let man run the house and the church. They had to learn how to be spiritually and learn how to pray. This was preparing them for their roles as women in the church to support man who was head of the church. Woman was made from man for man and even in the church I think that's what these passages meant. Women do have a place in the church but man should be the head.

The other participants did not fully participate in this assessment; they indicated that they needed more time. They responded they did not have a full understanding and/or feel equipped enough to write about the scriptures. Since this was a new process being introduced to them, the author was understanding and decided to not pressure the women. After reading some of the responses of the volunteers, the facilitator felt sick to her stomach. The truth of the matter is that these women are blind to any bias in the church. The patriarchal structure has been so embedded in their souls that it is almost as if these women do not dare speak out loud that which may offend God. As far as they were concerned, man is the head, and that is the final story. In participant three's interpretation, women are to be servants, and their roles are to support men in the church; women are to be humble and obedient in order to be acceptable in the eyes of God.

Fourth data findings using the participants' journals

The results of the journaling efforts made by the volunteers varied to a large degree. However, consistent in the writings were clear indication of the women's convictions, compassion, and validation of their belief in women preachers.

The author's decision to share the story of Jarena Lee as a learning tool was risky, in that, with this group, any attempt at persuasion seemed to be perceived with offense. This was understandable, considering that they had previously been comfortable and

content in their church setting, and this author came along and, in effect, told them that there is still much work to do.

Participant one was most impressive; she seems to have begun what may be perceived as a conversion experience. Her journal writings indicated that she was prideful and grateful for the journey Ms. Lee took for women, and the story helped to awaken her spirit. Although she felt sorry for the pain in Ms. Lee's life, she was glad to read her story, and the fruits of the author's labor seemed to manifest in the revelation that participant one experienced and her subsequent reverence for exegesis and scripture. The story helped her feel "eager" to move forward in the process. There were similar themes as well with participant two and three, both of whom displayed the desire to know more of God, and an interest in the project implementation. Participant three indicated that she felt more compelled to seek her calling as a result of her participation in this exercise. Participant four pointed out the perseverance that Ms. Lee showed, and her position on the issues indicated to this writer that perhaps this participant, along with participants six and eight might be dealing with some issues of the heart. The parts of the story that caught their interest, and their own reflections, dealt primarily with depression, forgiveness, the sense of personhood, and guilt. There definitely appeared to be a perceptual shift brought about by this experience with participant four, as she revealed her discovery that true forgiveness may be part of her growth. Whether that forgiveness is connected to self-inflicted pain or self-esteem issues is not yet evident. Participant five, being the youngest of the group, seems to present the most fertile ground in that she is the most innocent by far, and ready to learn. She had detailed the magnitude of her awe of God, and expressed that she is looking for validation as confirmation and nothing more.

This writer's observation is that tradition and religion can kill a spirit, if life is not brought forth. Participant five seems neither fazed nor ruined by the rules and regulations of traditional church settings and their biases. Participant seven seemed eager and hungry to know more about God. It seemed that her spirit resonated with the spiritual baptisms that Ms. Lee had with the spirit of God, and she mentioned that she wanted that. It appears from this observation that she has opened up through the experience, and wants a deeper relationship with God, and this participant seems to be moving in that direction. Participant ten initially caused a great deal of concern to the author as to whether she would be receptive to any of the resources offered to her in this learning process. Her journaling reflects her inability to be swayed or her resistance to be open concerning criticizing the text. Her experience with the story was that the Holy Spirit would take the lead if we are to gain knowledge concerning the Bible. Although the author does not disagree with this, it shows that participant ten has strong feelings toward women overstepping their boundaries, even when it comes to their relationship with God.

The facilitator hoped to see a full transformation in these women in proving the hypothesis. Through their reflections and journaling, it seemed that all of the women experienced some type of conversion, all of which are not supportive of the hypothesis. However, some conversions of thought, and transformations did appear to occur, as well as even declarations by the women to walk in their purpose.

Fifth data findings using the Bible study

The participants' responses to the Bible study were shockingly disappointing to the author. More than a few of the women did not feel that the book was a good choice

for the group. The author's disappointment was mitigated, however, once the author was able to come to terms with the knowledge that each woman displayed raw emotions toward the book. Their reactions were clear, and the good part was that they were moved to action. The consistent response was that each woman felt they had their own story, and Hagar did not represent them. They could relate, but Hagar and God's response to her was disappointing and rejected by the group as not consistent with the God they serve. Surprisingly, participant ten, the one whom the author felt would be the most resistant to being receptive, seemed the most open to the Hagar story. She presented a realistic and mature view, based on her experiences as an older woman. The author's revelation in regard to this was that a group of older women may have grasped the concepts more easily and agreed with Delores Williams' intent for the book. But due to the fact that the majority of the women were early and late 40's, with a few twenty year olds and one teenager, the mammie experience was not their experience. At some point the author of the book lost the interest of all of those women. The women were able to re-engage with the writing when it got to the topic of womanist theology. The common response was that they all felt exceptionally good about women speaking for women's rights and justice. These women were not interested in focusing on the abuse endured, as much as the overcoming of the abuse we have endured as black women. The Bible study itself was seen as a positive experience because the women have now got a taste for going deeper in the word of God, and they would like to continue with the Bible study on empowerment for women. Participants five, eight and ten seemed to show signs of transformation in terms of having a liberating experience. The other women showed signs of resistance to

seeing the Bible as a liberating document, and this may be difficult for them to do unless they can get past the anger of the past.

Fifth data findings using the post questionnaire

The issues that the author was looking at through observation of the post questionnaire were whether the participants had any major transformations, whether they discovered their gifts, if they felt they could read the Bible as a liberating document, and if they felt empowered to help other women develop those same skills. (See Appendix H)

Participant one: A transformation did occur with participant one. She went from feeling it was unacceptable to question God, to feeling strongly that it is acceptable when done with a right heart and mind in an effort to gain understanding. She was not sure if she had yet discovered her gift, but she did feel empowered to help other women with the knowledge she had acquired during the trainings.

Participant two: The transformation that took place for this volunteer was in regard to the question as to whether there is any valid reason not to ordain women; she went from having no opinion to expressing that there are no valid reasons to not ordain women. She also changed her view on the question, "Do you think the socioeconomic and political aspects of the past bear the infliction of bias towards women of the church today? (i.e., inability to vote, seen as subordinate to men, home makers, helpmate, race, gender and class). Her response to this question went from disagreeing to agreeing. She did feel like she knows her gift, and feels empowered to help other women.

Participant three: This participant did not start out with an opinion as to whether it was appropriate to question God, but she went in the direction of feeling it was

unorthodox to question God. The author's intent was to help women become liberated by criticizing text which may cause them to ask God the deep things concerning him. This participant instead went in the opposite direction, however it was still her experience. She did feel like she has discovered her spiritual gift and she feels strongly empowered to help other women.

Participant four: She went from no opinion as to whether there are valid reasons not to ordain women to disagreeing. She currently indicates that she believes there are no reasons to keep women from the call on their lives. She has discovered her gift, and went from agree to strongly agree with regard to having the ability to help empower other women.

Participant five: This was the youngest participant, and the most eager to learn, in the author's opinion. She went from no opinion to agreeing in regard to socioeconomic influences being a factor in the way women are treated today. She did not feel like she had yet discovered her gift, but she went from disagreeing to agreeing that she felt like she could help empower other women. This participant also went from agreeing you should not question God to disagreeing, indicating she now feels it is acceptable to ask God what you need, even if it is questioning what she does not understand.

Participant six: The young "first lady" of the new pastor went from no opinion to agreeing that there is validity in questioning the writings of Paul for authenticity. She also felt that social and political influences play a part in how women are treated and went from having no opinion to agreeing in this area. She was not sure if she had yet discovered her gift, but she went from having no opinion to agreeing that she felt more empowered to help other women.

Participant seven: This participant held very strong opinions and was also very bold in her assertions. She went from having no opinion to agreeing that there was validity in questioning the writings for authenticity with the writings of Paul. She felt she has discovered her gift, and felt strongly that she is empowered to help other women.

Participant eight: This was a very humble and gentle participant. She went from having no opinion on whether questioning God as unorthodox, to agreeing that it was acceptable to question God. She did discover her gift, and feels she is empowered to help other women. She went from having no opinion to strongly agreeing with regard to her readiness to help other women.

Participant nine: She was the oldest member of the group and the "first lady" of the church. None of her opinions changed from her pre questionnaire to her post questionnaire. The author believes that this participant did experience some transformation and was more open to some of the lessons taught, but did not indicate that on her post test. She also said she believes she discovered her gift, but had no opinion as to whether she could help empower other women or not, based upon the information she had.

Participant ten: This participant went from having no opinion to having an agreeable opinion as to whether there was any validity to questioning the authenticity of the writings of Paul. She was not sure if she had discovered her gifts, but went from disagreeing to agreeing with feeling empowered to help other women.

Sixth data findings using the exit interviews

1. Can you describe to me your overall experience for this training?

2. Do you feel because of this training your life will be impacted any differently?
3. Do you have a better understanding of interpreting scripture and do you feel empowered to help other women?
4. Do you have any thoughts on oppression and patriarchy?
5. Did you discover your purpose as a result of this training?

Exit Interview Questions—Group

6. Can you describe to me your overall experience for this training?
7. Do you feel because of this training your life will be impacted any differently?
8. Do you have a better understanding of interpreting scripture and do you feel empowered to help other women?
9. Do you have any thoughts on oppression and patriarchy?
10. Did you discover your purpose as a result of this training?

Response to the Interview Questions

The women's responses regarding the overall experience were insightful. The consensus was that the knowledge they gained was enlightening. They confessed that the information was empowering and that they realized there was a lot of work to be done in relation to empowering women. The work was also identified as their need to help women discover their gifts. The majority of the women said that because of their participation in the training, their lives were impacted. One of the participants found that the knowledge on exegesis would help her to develop a greater understanding of the Word. A few participants expressed that the knowledge imparted would help them to be mindful to read the Bible in a liberating way. The overall experience took them from a

place of ignorance regarding patriarchal influences to a place of observation, and it appears that this observation will take them to a place of action. The women were of mixed opinions as to whether they had gained a better understanding of how to interpret scripture. They all however, expressed that they now were aware of the process and in a better position to help others. I heard from the women that any type of oppression is salacious, that patriarchy is the manipulation used in the church and any form of oppression should be spoken against. One main point that came across was that the women admitted they did not know that they were oppressed. Their complacency was the result of being church women. They admitted to accepting any form of bias with submissive behaviors. The women now shared that they understood that group oppression and patriarchal behaviors were wrong. Most of the group discovered and/or confirmed their gifts during the training. Distinguishing between gift and purpose was somewhat confusing for participants, but once they understood the context was one and the same, the majority agreed that they were prepared to walk in purpose. Those who had previously not felt equipped to do so indicated that they felt equipped to do so after the training.

In conclusion, the women expressed that they felt the experience was a shared one. They indicated that their participation in the project was a safe and intimate experience, and although they all did not share all the same opinions in the end, they did all report having some type of transformation as a result of their participation.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The biases of the author appear to have affected the project and to have resulted in skewed results. In order to modify the project, and to attempt to produce a completed project that was not affected by the biases of the author, a final seminar was conducted to glean specific data from the volunteers. The information gained from the project as previously implemented was collected, and a series of additional questions was presented to the participants, in an attempt to get an unbiased view.

A half day seminar was conducted; the women met and began with opening prayer at 9:00 A.M., took one break at eleven for lunch, and finished at 12:30 P.M. They closed out in prayer. During the course of the session, the facilitator explained that this additional meeting was necessary just to obtain more information for the completion of the course. The facilitator instructed the context associate to ask the questions, and personally noted the responses throughout the session.

The themes discovered included:

1. Women's ordination is necessary/needed/valid and sanctioned by God.
2. Women have the God given right to lead in churches, workplace and family.
3. Church leaders should always speak out against all forms of abuse, especially toward women.
4. Liberation comes from within; we can free ourselves from oppression.
5. Black women are still oppressed by the system.

6. Knowledge is power.
7. Questioning God is good when it causes us to grow in our faith.
8. Holy Spirit is all that is needed for understanding the bible.

And the discussion questions presented were:

1. Do you believe there are biases against women in the church today? If yes, do you believe the biases are part of God's design for the human race?
2. How do you believe women in the Bible are portrayed? Seductress, temptress or co-heir to the Kingdom?
3. Do you believe that church leaders should be required to speak out against all abuse, especially abuse towards women?
4. Do you believe that women have the God-given right to take leadership roles in churches, workplace and the family?
5. Do you believe that questioning God can lead to spiritual growth?
6. Do you believe that black women are oppressed by society?

The women started out in a very analytical manner, as they first discussed the definition of the term bias. They began by defining the definition as a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Favor used in verb form, similarly to bias, means to feel or show approval or preference for.

The women admitted that they were reluctant to say definitively whether or not there are biases that ever occur against women in the church, especially with so many different denominations and methodologies of Christian practice. The reaction varied from reluctant to respond to an apprehension to receive and process new information and new ideas. Their responses mirrored that reactions as the group discussion regressed to a

similar (conversations) that took place at the beginning of this project. Personal experiences would not warrant ecological validity in the case of a yes or no answer. However it was their belief that based on biblical research, biases in Christian history do exist, not simply against women, but also for them. That is, even when a bias may appear to be against a woman, it really proves to be in support of God's plan for her life and purpose. The women cited the example of one of the most popular biases towards a woman found in the Bible, God's choice to use Mary, a woman, as a vessel for the delivery of our Lord and Savior into this world. Could a man find that to be biased against men? Among other examples, Mary was a woman who was shown favor by God, as detailed in Luke 1:28. Out of the dust, God made man, and from man's rib, he created woman. Therefore, could a God so vast and powerful have chosen any other method to deliver Christ to this world? He showed a bias toward a woman, and she was blessed to call Jesus Christ her son. The participant women stated that they believed that there are certainly biases against women within the church that are expressed in other forms. There is bias, I believe, that is grounded in culture. The women articulated that, for centuries past, women were seen as the lesser sex, and even considered property. However, we do not live in those days now. Women can vote, and go to desegregated schools. Slavery has been abolished, and black people can own property. Times have changed; however there are churches, especially those that are extremely conservative, that cling to societal norms of the past to justify their position regarding the 21st century church. The participants further stated that if you examine who God is, it is clear that God did not intend for there to be any biases as a part of His design for the human race. The ultimate example can be taken from Jesus Christ. Again, the women went back to their knowledge of Bible and

pointed out that in the book of Matthew, it is recorded that Jesus was with the Sadducees and the Pharisees when one of them asked which is the greatest of the commandments. Jesus' simple reply was that the greatest commandment was love. If you love someone, you would not treat them badly. If you love someone, you would not discriminate against them. If you love someone, you would treat them with dignity and respect. Though it may be a part of a cultural identity that has long since ended, the church has a responsibility to share the gospel of love, and to end practices that exclude our sisters from fulfilling the greatness given to them from God. And finally, a few stated that they do not think it was God's design that there would be bias, but that man made bias for the functionality of the human race. They further stated that God is a spirit, and he does things in the spiritual realm, and shows proof of those things in the natural realm. Women have been kept in bondage for too long because of traditional biases. Most of it comes from the lack of knowledge, and things have been passed down from generations. When you come into the full truth and knowledge of God, he will open your spiritual eyes and ears. Women are very important in the Kingdom of God.

One of the more oppositional views indicated that women do not understand the word of God; women need to come to understand their place in God's will for their life. Another spoke on her knowledge of the Catholic Church, indicating that there are biases against women in the Catholic Church. For example, women's ordination as priests is prohibited, and they are restricted from priesthood. The Bishop's action of attempting the ordination of a woman would be both illicit (against the laws and regulations of the Church), and invalid (ineffective, and hence null and void). Ordination of men is an unbroken tradition that goes back not only to the Apostles, but to Christ Himself.

When determining how the participants view women as portrayed in the Bible, this conversation did not offer enough explanation, and it appears that the women felt limited in their responses. The women stated that, from the standpoint of being Christian, the Bible is the true word of God. They suggested that answering this question requires a differentiation between historical accounts and fictional stories. They began by answering the question from the perspective that the Bible is a historical account. With that in mind, they indicated that women are not portrayed by the Bible, but their actions have portrayed themselves. Biblical characters are not flat; they are dynamic and complex. Some were seductresses, and some were saints, some were temptresses, and others were rulers, however all are depicted as they were. After a few minutes of thought, the women agreed to see women from the perspective of the author, as each one of these. Rahab could have been considered both a seductress and a temptress, based on the interpretation that she was a prostitute, as could also most certainly be said for Delilah, in her pursuit to discover the source of Samson's strength. One fact that is clear is that we are all co-heirs to the Kingdom; male or female, based solely on the satisfaction of the sin debt paid by Jesus Christ on the cross. Through further discussion, the women stayed the Biblical course with their statements and opinions, going back to the Bible repeatedly. They described what is stated in Genesis 2:18, where the Lord said it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a help meet for him. Women are very important in the kingdom; when the weeping was going on in Jerusalem, they called for the weeping women, the women of Zion. The women said they believe it was the design of God that He would speak through those whom he felt had the gift to preach the gospel. Women are vessels to preach the gospel, and this is another tool used to release His word.

There are differences of how women were betrayed in the bible between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, women's primary position was to nourish family life, and their most important function was childbearing. A woman that could not bear a child was considered to have a curse from God, and examples of that would be Rachel, Sarah and Hannah.

Women also were important in political roles; Bathsheba was portrayed to have been manipulative during the end of David's reign as king, to insure Solomon the throne.

When responding to the question as to whether they believed that church leaders should be required to speak out against all abuse, especially abuse towards women, the women responded that they absolutely believed that should be a mandate. They went back to their knowledge of the Bible again, referencing the greatest commandment, which is to love. To love God is to follow His commandments, and to follow His commandments means to love people. They asked, if you truly love God, how can you then hurt or abuse someone? The women collaborated to bring forth a few of the scriptures that fit the issue they were discussing, such as James 3:1, which states, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." Teachers of the word of God are held to a higher level of accountability, and have a responsibility to spread the true and uncompromised word of God. They further cited Psalms 11:5, which states, "The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth" and Colossians 3:19, which states, "Husbands, love [your] wives, and be not bitter against them", as well as Ephesians 4:29 which states, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." The volunteers searched and

discovered there were many scriptures that teach against physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. They all agreed that if it is the word of God, it should be taught even as it applies to the abuse of women. Yes, they stated that all abuse should be acknowledged in the church, by leadership or saints; sin is not sin. Nine out of ten indicated that most abuse is toward women, however they did not say that men do not get abused. When the Lord allows us to see something, it is our responsibility to bear our brothers and sisters. As stated in Galatians 6:2, "Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ."

The next question presented was whether the participants believed that women have the God-given right to take leadership roles in churches, workplace and family. One of the younger women spoke first; she articulated that she did believe women have the right to take leadership roles. To say that they do not would mean that God has somehow made women unequal, and therefore He cannot use them. Another chimed in, and said again that historically, women have been seen as inferior and even treated as property, and so the idea that women cannot lead is a result of an antiquated way of thinking that no longer applies to the 21st century. Furthermore, they stated that any role, particularly leadership, whether in the church, workplace or family centers around being a servant. As recorded in Luke 8:1-3, Mary, Susanna, and Joanna were servants to Jesus and his ministry. One of the women objected to the majority opinion, and she stated that she did not agree with women overseers, or pastors of the church, and women should not usurp the authority of men. She used 1Timothy 3:1-16 and 1 Timothy 2:12 to illustrate her point. From a different perspective, the context associate asked if there were any more viewpoints on the topic. They stated that when it comes to the workplace, it is standard in

society that women can be CEO, president, or vice president, etc. When it comes to the family, sometimes there is only one parent in the house, and usually that is a mother. The Word says to let the older women teach the younger women. Women have a leadership role in relation to her children.

The context associate then transitioned easily into conversation about the spiritual growth of women and questioning God. There was a sense of uncertainty among the women around these questions, which I assume was related to the same emotions that were expressed a few weeks back in the course. One of the women spoke up and indicated that, yes, we are encouraged to pray and seek God's face daily. Having no questions would support a notion that we know everything that is to be known, which is absolutely false. Through prayer, fasting, and studying the scriptures, our relationship with God grows, and our abilities, talents and gifts are expanded. Yes, even Jesus himself questioned his father; you have to sometimes, to get directions on what path he wants you to take.

The context associate then stated the last question, i.e., "Do you believe that black women are oppressed by society?" The reply was given in relation to the literal sense of the word oppression, and the women stated, no, they did not believe this to be true. This response was based on the understanding of oppression as being the constant, cruel and unjust exercise of authority over black women as a whole. One participant stated, "I do not believe that black women fall under this category." However, she admitted to believing that individually, black women can be treated unfairly as an act of discrimination, but these are all isolated incidents when compared to the totality of what we describe as oppression. Another woman indicated that yes, black women are

oppressed by society; not just in society but, in their homes, family, and even the church. This oppression is all about power; it can be spiritual or mental, and you have to guard your heart at all times, or life itself will make you oppressed, burdened, weary and heavy in your spirit. The women continued by articulating that they believe black people overall are oppressed by society, that men have fought for centuries, and it is woman's responsibility to be obedient and support the man, who is the head of the house.

Reflection

I began this project with the preconceived notion that women all felt some kind of oppression in the traditional church setting. My hypothesis was that if I could provide the resources and teachings, women would learn to read the Bible as a liberating document, and their desire was based on the assumption that the patriarchal influences of men have caused the women of Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church to be oppressed.

I implemented my project looking for specifics. For example, did the women understand how to exegete scripture? Did they even understand what the characteristics of oppression looked like? And lastly, did they know their gifts or feel empowered to help other women discover their purpose in the church? In the end, I wanted to see if I could identify any generalizations or range of emotions, within the context.

After the implementation of my project, my mentors felt that I had a biased approach to gathering my data, rather than doing so objectively. I did not agree, but I knew going into the project that I posed questions to gather the data to support my hypothesis. I did gather data and equally report the opinions of those who did not support

my hypothesis, as well. Taking into consideration the expertise of my mentors, I implemented another seminar, in which I acted as facilitator only.

What I discovered was that the volunteers initial responses were not too far from the responses given in the latter seminar. The discovery was the transcendence that came forth from the women. The comfort that each woman demonstrated in this setting was astonishing. They were talkative, free and forthcoming in their opinions. The questions presented allowed the women to be free from any bias the author may have imposed upon them earlier. The modification was a sure way to validate that the data was not tainted, and the information was credible. In the beginning, I was dismayed and annoyed at what I felt was a lack of interest and/or knowledge from the women concerning what I believed to be their oppressed position. I initially felt they were slow to respond, and ignorant of what I considered patriarchal behaviors that impeded on the progress of women in the church.

In contradiction to those feelings however, when I acted as facilitator, I was impressed with how well the women articulated what they had learned and how they felt, and even how they supported their responses with Biblical examples. Initially, I felt that the entire Bible, written as a whole, was influenced by patriarchal views. I am more inclined now to believe the patriarchal views of the Bible are major contributing factors as to how women view themselves in the eyes of God. Furthermore, the masculinity of the Bible also supports, in part, women's perceptions of how God sees them.

In retrospect, I have learned that interpretation is not all-inclusive. I have learned that the position I am to take is not to free women from what I deem oppressive, but rather, my purpose is to teach the women how to read the Bible from a liberating stance.

In doing so, I am able to teach the women how to identify and dispel the biases that arise out of traditional church settings.

I am persuaded to encourage future theologians to stick to the facts in a project resembling my own. If I had to do it over, I would have gone forward with more oppositional data, to make sure that I put forth a less adulterated study.

The project revealed that the volunteers each faced some type of bias within the church, but no one spoke up concerning those barriers and conflicts that they faced. When coordinating my project, I realized that the women had adopted coping mechanisms to deal with their discomforts.

The themes and the responses from the last seminar confirmed that the findings of the project were accurate. The women authenticated the information, through their raw emotions, to be equivalent to the data collected throughout the process. The methodology was conducive to a qualitative research formula. In combination with the themes and the findings of the last seminar, the evidence demonstrates substantial data to support my hypothesis. The women also demonstrated they were intuitively studying their Bibles and using the tools they were taught during the project. After the seminar, it was clear that the women had not been forced into some kind of opinion by the author. Just the same, it was clear there was some leading and bias on the author's part, in an effort to gain a certain answer to prove her hypothesis. The seminar provided some insight and clarity on the position of the women. They recognized that they were in a traditional church setting, and they did not feel they lacked the ability to learn, or that they missed out on being gifted toward their purpose. However, they proved to have benefited tremendously through the

project and the teachings given to them. The themes discovered were consistent with what the author gleaned from the women previously.

The biases that were discovered, through the implementation of this project, to be present within the church, include:

1. The idea that women must submit to their husbands, and if there is no husband, must seek the pastor's advice before making any major decisions, (such as adopting children and being single).

2. The idea that a man must cover a woman in all ministry activities, (i.e., women's ministry must be overseen by male leader).

3. The idea that the way a woman dresses can cause her to be the downfall of the men in church, (i.e., leg coverings are offered when women's dresses are considered inappropriate).

4. Women who are called to be ministers have to be validated by first serving in other ministries, to see if the pastor agrees the call is validated within him as a calling of God.

5. The men of the church are not expected to fall under submission of the women ministers.

As stated above, the biases identified were the biases that were identified by the author throughout the project implementation. These biases are not biases that the women who participated in this project identified. The women only identified the things that they felt hindered them in reference to the interpretation of the scriptures and the gifts they felt they had not discovered. When it came to their positions within the church, none of the women addressed the biases. The author did not identify these biases to the women because these were biases discovered through the process of implementing the project, and more importantly, in order to not affect the results with preconceived notions from the author that were not favorable. These biases, although identified by the author, were

not part of the hypothesis through which the author was to gather her data. They did support the author's inclinations and suspicions, however, which were gleaned from being a part of the ministry that initially sparked her interest to uncover the biases felt to be a hindrance to the women of Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church, and their discovery of their purpose.

The results of the qualitative information are as follows. Based upon the field findings, the project implementation was successful. There were six out of ten participants who discovered their gifts. Six of the women already knew they possessed some type of gift at the beginning of the training; their answers went from "agree" to "strongly agree". Three went from "did not know" they had a spiritual gift to "disagree" to "agree". Nine of the ten participants now felt empowered to empower other women. And as far as reading the Bible as a liberating document, all participants felt knowledgeable enough to accomplish the task. The outcome of the project implementation is that Pastor Caple would like Minister Taylor to continue to teach the women of Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church the Bible studies trainings.

Throughout the training, there were some minor and major transformations. The women mostly showed a common theme when it came to questioning God. Quite a few participants felt that questioning God was unorthodox. After the project implementation, the participants felt it was acceptable to question God to some degree. The main issue surrounding that determination was whether there is a right motive and heart when questioning God. Some of the patriarchal influences and biases that confront women were identified throughout the project. The majority of participants identified that they

now believed that socio-economic and political factors play a part in how women are treated today.

As stated earlier, I started out very bothered and disturbed by the passive attitudes that the women initially began their participation with. It appeared that the women were presenting as unresponsive, uncaring or negligent in regard to the patriarchal concerns the author presented. After the second session, it was recognized that the women were just unaware of the biases that confined them. A few of the participants seemed aware, but afraid to speak out regarding their feelings. Women, attentive to the stature of God, walked a tight line of submission. A few of the participants spoke often about submission. They considered that submission under the preacher or husband was reflective of their obedience to God. Immediately, I recognized that the chains of oppression were hidden silently within most of the women's hearts. Again, I identified their lack of awareness as a coping mechanism.

The format that I chose concerning the project implementation was intentional. My intent for the project implementation was to liberate the women from any bias or patriarchal influences that would oppress them. The word of God, being the center of my project, was the basis for my hypothesis; this is the reason that empowering the women with the tools and resources to read the Bible was the most important aspect.

The first session, focused on teaching the women to exegete the Bible, was very unsuccessful. About eight out of ten of the women felt the exegesis process was unnecessary. They did not feel it was correct or acceptable to criticize the text. The group indicated that they felt it was a criticism or demonstration of disbelief of God. This consensus changed as the classes continued to grasp and welcome this resource.

Although the story of Hagar was not liked by the majority of the women, it was the redeeming factor for the project. The women were furious after reading the first few chapters of Hagar. They felt the story had a negative connotation linked to the worth of black women, and overall it was negative. The stories of Mammie and mistress, the historical references showing how black women were so devalued and used, angered the women, as well as me. Some may say it is a testimony to how far we have come, but as a black woman, I recognize that anger usually accompanies the reflections of the abuses of past history. Only after the story and the remaining chapters were covered, did the women begin to see the correlation of exegesis of the scriptures, and being empowered. They realized through being able to exegete the text, it gave them some influence over the course of their spiritual development, and other women's paths to their calling. The women saw that reading the text from a liberating stance could reveal the love of God. This was a revelation; that text is always meant to empower and not suppress them.

The women began their participation in this project without knowing their gifts. However, the majority have now discovered what their gifts are.

My reflections have given me great insight into the overall experience of my project. I have gained greater perspective regarding what it means to walk by faith, and not by sight. A lot of times during my work I was putting a paper together here and there but as I continued to put my papers together, I began to see the project unfolding. I knew that if I did not initially have the complete understanding of what God was trying to reveal to me, that it would come. The independent learning, to which I have become accustomed, has developed me in the area of being more accountable for my own work. I have learned that I do have the wisdom to complete this project, and that without faith it

is truly impossible to please God. I did have a clear understanding of those words, but I have had the chance to walk out and stand on the concrete evidence of God's word. I have learned what courage looks like by walking; even when I was fearful, I kept walking. I reached many breaking points, but God's grace proved sufficient.

I am assured now that my work is life transforming and will empower the generations to follow, as well as impact the women of this generation that are receptive to growing within the ministry. The work which I have been ordained to do is significant in that my mission, freeing women from oppression, will break barriers that have been in place for centuries. This change will not be overnight, and feminists have already broken many barriers for women in the face of adversity, of course, but in my space and my part of the world, it will make an impact that will change traditional ministry. My context will, in time, have a global effect on the way in which women view themselves in the eyes of God. Whether God be female or male in the view of human kind, I will be a part of the transformative process to help inform feminists and men alike that God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. With that understanding and the correct context in which the word of God is given, not only will women be free, but perhaps the masculine context in which the Bible was written will be elevated from the authority in which it stands to the authority of God. I have learned that I have been honored to be in the invaluable position of bringing forth a project on empowering women who are in a traditional church setting to confront bias. It has become even more apparent to me as a woman, in addition to being a black woman, that the obstacles to justice are a steep mountain to climb. My context has helped me gain the courage and the fortitude to push forward in the midst of controversy. Pastor Cain, during

her sermon for our Thursday morning intensive, encouraged me when I felt at my weakest. She said, your credibility will be questioned but in your anxiety, remember your problem is working for my favor. I then began to look at the obstacles and my struggles to bring this project to fruition, as a blessing that God has allowed to come my way. I am able to clearly see that when God has asked a work of you, your best work is a reflection of his blessing. Dr. Sharon Davis used the example of our thesis to ask the question, "What would your thesis look like if this document was our worship?" My response was that it would be done in decency and in order. That this project, that he has required of my hands, would be acceptable in his sight, therefore, means putting my best foot forward, knowing that what I present could never be acceptable in his sight, so my efforts are boundless. This reality will require that all of me be emptied so that all of Him can be glorified.

In this process, I have gained peace in the knowing that the storms of life are inevitable. I am confident that I have prevailed against all odds and all of those barriers that have come up against me during my three years. I am assured that his word will not return unto Him void and I have gained my voice. I am determined to walk in my purpose, and remember the rock from which I was cut and the quarry in which I was mined, his name is Jesus. I have gained the insight to think about the fullness of the Spirit in light of sanctification; it means being emptied of myself. I have come to a place of nothingness, as all I have has been poured out, that God can be poured in. I have discovered that I am driven by my call, and this is my call from God, and this is where my strength comes from. Through adversity, I have discovered that I am becoming more empowered and clear in my position and my thoughts concerning this precious document.

I have learned that all my trails have made me stronger, and in the examination of myself I have gained the insight of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is here to lead me, guide me and provide me with the knowledge to achieve the work God has placed before me.

Summary

The fight for justice and liberation has always been a personal struggle in my life. A lot of my struggle was corporate related, but a lot was also mental; I wondered why some had and others did not, and why I tried but could not. I have come to see that like the Israelites, we do have the ability to be free in our minds, and within the contexts of our lives, but we often want to go back to what is comfortable and safe. The context of my project, dealing with biases that hinder the women of the Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church, has helped me to see that it all begins in the church. So much of what we are taught growing up shapes and develops our character and how we will respond to adversities that may hinder us from reaching our full human potential. Exploration of the context in which I worked to develop this project is needed to aid in the progression of justice and humanity for women in the church. This project, and the context in which I have found myself, has truly been a therapeutic experience for me, and a liberating one as well. To elaborate on my perceptions concerning my context, I would say the following: I understand that my work is ordained by God. This is not something that I sought to do, to pursue my doctorate. In fact, I was sure that I was done with all the school I was going to attend. I did not want to be bothered with more, and once the Holy Spirit spoke to me about the plans that God has for me, I still struggled to understand how this could be possible. Now, my perception is, *how could it not be me?* As I have seen my project

unfold, I understand why God chose me. The shackles of religion that held me captive are no longer holding me. I have had the opportunity to address the concerns of my heart, and have done it with the intention of helping other women who face those same biases to become empowered, as well. We think that when God calls us to do a work that it is all about God and him receiving his glory, but God is so kind and just that it always works for our good. This experience has been about me finding my voice, and about me gaining my liberty through Jesus, so that I can help empower others to do the same. I took one step in entering the program, and God has led me the rest of the way. My perception overall now is that my context is necessary. It is necessary to walk this path in order that others may see the pure heart of God, and the justice he bestows upon all his children, and not just some.

The data collected reinforced my belief that the masculine reference of the Bible contributes to the way women interpret scripture. The patriarchal influences in traditional church validate the concepts of masculine control and power wielded over docile women. Biases are a part of a plan for the good we created in our image. Biases do exist in the church and outside the church. Women are often times pacified in their respective roles to help them feel important. This mask of affirmation by men encourages the complicit behaviors of women. The result is a trade off of complacency verses a true experience with God. The Bible has been used as a weapon to keep women submissive to the machismo of men. We have, as women, been guiled into believing that God chose us as second hand citizens, behind man, who was made in his image. Yet, God is neither male nor female. The image we hold is that of a covering that will dissipate when he appears, and in a twinkling of an eye we shall be changed to be like him.

The extent to which patriarchal influences lie is sin. In readings from Augustine, debates with the Pelicans, sin is a form of a loss of love for God, and self-elevation. Sin is that which separates us from a Holy God. Is it a sin to use our personal experiences to interpret the text we bring forward to our congregants? How else do we combine history with modern day living?

In my project, the biases identified did not support the notion of women being seductresses. The discussion expunged the belief that women were seductresses, as was noted in the reading. The women did not clearly state or suggest fully whether they identified the women of the Bible as seductresses, however, I would have liked them to discuss this topic further. This was the one section of the seminar the women seemed to withdraw and become incoherent in regard to. My observation leads me to conclude that this is a clear indicator of the discomfort within the church with regard to sexuality. This aloofness in response to the subject indicates the discomfort of the women with their willingness to discuss their sexuality and God.

My project used vast methods of implementation to address the complexity of women and the biases that we face. In the Hagar story, we touched upon the feminist point of view and considered "God as She". Would this be the link to connect us to a genderless God? The church as the processor instead of the predecessor, who sets the precedent we should follow, the carnal world or the church?

One of the main components of the project was the hermeneutics concerning the text. Interpretation of the word will come from shared experiences; the experience the preacher brings from his own personal life, and the experiences that are detailed in the historical accounts of the text and the experience you conclude from your modern day

reality. I cannot conclude that I must teach women how to correctly interpret the text. What I have discovered as the problem is the sin of man, which is not attributed to the ideology of God. God left us written word to lead us to a life of eternal salvation. He left us a mandate to go and spread the good news. In our sin, the good news becomes skewed, whether through our own teachings, or simply through the sin within us that leads us to not decipher the text through His love. We all fall short of His glory. Just as there will be the poor amongst us always, there will also be the oppressed. However, in contradiction to that, we are asked to feed the poor, and we are asked to set the captives free.

This has become the turning point for my shared experience to become action. By teaching women to read the Bible as a liberating document, we begin a chain of events toward liberty. We overcome by empowering one woman to reach another. We take part in the shared experience of telling the story, recalling our stories and creating new stories. In addition, we tear down the cultural myths and redefine our truths. Tradition, if not grounded in love, has no place in religion. Religion, if backed by false statements of who God is, has no place among us as women. God is Spirit, and providing the tools and resources to bring us to that reality provides a true spiritual experience with God. Only then can our authenticity be discovered, which will allow us to walk in our purpose.

In order to keep the women and myself from reverting back to the old ways that oppressed us, continuous empowerment sessions will continue. Through these sessions women will continue to read the bible in a literary context. I will continue to examine myself and to sort through the personal issues that kept me angry through much of this project. Once I discovered the bias within myself and the anger that oppressed me, I was able to move forward in my desire to empower others.

Conclusion

The importance of rewriting was a vital part of the development of this project. Revising my writings often redirected me to experience the leading of the Holy Spirit. This redirection produced a better thought process and clarified for me what needed to be enunciated. In addition, I became a much stronger academic writer over the course of three years.

I was driven by my call. I soon discovered that I was not strong enough to do it alone; this is where the strength of God and the Holy Spirit bears witness. Through adversity, I have become more empowered. The Holy Spirit has led me, guided me and provided me with the knowledge needed to achieve the work that God has placed before me.

I have discovered, being a black woman, confronting the issue of oppression has proven to be a steep mountain to climb. But during that climb, the shackles of religion that held me captive no longer hold me bondage. I have had the opportunity to address the concerns of my heart and do it with the intention of helping other women.

I have gained a greater perspective on what it means to walk by faith and not by sight. A lot of times during my work, I was putting a paper together here and there, but as I continued to put my papers together, I began to see the project unfolding. I knew that if I did not initially have the complete understanding of what God was trying to reveal to me that it would come. The independent learning which I have become accustomed to has developed. I have learned that I did have the wisdom to complete this project, and without faith, it is truly impossible to please God. I did have a clear understanding of those words but I have had the chance to walk out and stand on the concrete evidence of

God's word. I have learned what courage looks like by walking, and even when I was fearful, I kept walking anyhow. As a result of this decision, I will work toward establishing a model that can be replicated. This model will be designed to help women read the Bible as a liberating document and discover their purpose in the process.

The struggle to minister usually comes out of our own experiences. But in order to help anyone and liberate a person, we must learn to minimize our experiences as best as possible, in order to keep our focus on the context in which the scripture is given. Often, preachers use examples to bring a clearer picture for the learner, but we have to interpret the scripture first in the context of love. I think that the word "gospel" needs to be in the forefront of our minds with the message that we need to remember that it is the good news. Love convicts and not condemns, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, and not the law. The process of exploring information about where the patriarchal history began, and the rules and relationships within the traditional church has given me the insight needed to gain understanding as to why traditional church has missed the mark with developing and aiding women's search for their gifts and full human potential through God. God is love and not a discerner of persons. Therefore, I have learned the necessary components to bring revelation to the captives within the context of the women of the Greater Hickory Hill Baptist Church.

I discovered the stronghold of fear as I moved forward in my project. The confidence I have in writing my papers and the strong conviction I have for my project was lost through fear of failure and rejection. But my confidence grew as I opened myself to vulnerabilities, and focused on my willingness to learn and grow from the experience. As the Preachers gave their sermons and the teachers taught in Plenary, I carried away a

vast wealth of information that encouraged me. Rev. Tim Forbes' lecture inspired me not to sell out. Others gave me a boost of confidence, as I beamed in the choice to strive through Virginia Union University's Samuel Dewitt Master's program in the steps of Samuel D. Proctor. And lastly, Dr. Frank A. Thomas taught me the importance of the real life connection to the lyrics we sing, "Truth is Holy." Those words resonated with me as I pondered on how truth often times brings peace. Whether it brings good or bad news, there is something about having the sound foundation of truth that enables you to move forward with certainty. It was my mother who taught me that honesty was a virtue to have in life and it also produced the strong characteristic of integrity. Often, we forget our words are a reflection of who we are. The importance of words is what I took away from Dr. Thomas' teachings. In all this I have gained a sense of pride, not the pride that comes with a haughty fall, as Proverbs warns us, but a humble pride. Pride that I can see the moments I did not sell myself short; moments that I clearly chose truth over convenience and used my words for the edification and glory of God. I was immersed with useful teachings and information that helped me gain the insight that independent learning is a process of accountability. Although I am not where I desire to be, I am glad I took the journey, and look forward to the fruit of its completion. I discovered that I was biased in my approach. The perceptions which I brought to and through which I conducted my project were from my experience.

Another memorable plenary experience also provided words of validation. Dr. LaBoy, in a continuing work stated that this is not just a doctoral program, but that we have to remember that this is what God has called us to do. This is our life work, and we will have to be conscious that we do not go in and do our doctoral work and interview,

and get next to these people, and then leave them, as though we never were there. On the contrary, we are to be aware of what our work may be the beginning of, and/or what we are able to leave for the church to continue on with. I heard her say 'Breathe.' We do not have all the answers and do not know what God is up to, but we have to walk through the process. When Dr. LaBoy shared understanding about our cultural context, religiously, she shared the ability to move from religious to spiritual. This information flowed in conjunction with the theme of the Holy Spirit. In order to bring out the best God has within us, we need to understand the importance of the Holy Spirit, and the work of the Holy Spirit. We must not separate the Holy from the Holy Spirit. We must ask, what does the Holy Spirit have to do with this project; I understand it has everything to do with it. During the three year process, we often forgot that this has been what we have breathed, ate and drank for three years. But it became clear to me, as if the light bulb went off, that no one knows this project better than me. No one has read the amount of books, and spent the hours, writing and rewriting, in order to bring across what the Holy Spirit has ushered forth for me to present to the world; just me. Instead of being nervous, she advised that we become excited about being able to present what our passions are, what we are doing, and remember that we are the experts in the room. Dr. Davis said to get comfortable with our document, and this should be a time of celebration. We are rejoicing before the battle is won.

I continue to gain the fortitude to persevere. During this time I have gained the courage to speak up for what I believe in. As I have come into the final stages of this journey, I see that I have truly gained so much knowledge in the subject that concerns me. My calling and my passion to free women from the oppressive forces of hierarchy

has expanded so much over the three years. With this knowledge I have so much wisdom, and I have discovered, on purpose and accidentally, the tools needed to empower other women. Through this process, I have gained a greater calling within myself to continue in the work and purpose God has called me to. But most importantly, throughout this entire process, I have discovered and gained my voice. I know that my voice is validated by the call. I realized during this phase also that I can be stretched further than I imagined, as my mentors helped me bring forth a presentable gift to God. When I thought I would faint, the word came forth like pure gold, "those that wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings of eagles, they shall walk and not faint and run and not be weary." I thought I could not make it, but with the help of my mentors and my peers, I saw a transformation within myself that I had not noticed until now. I was so busy working through the process that I failed to see God was doing a complete work in me, and now I am encouraged by the insights I have gained about myself. I believe I can do this, I will do this, and I am completely humbled by this experience. There was self discovery that has been effective in analyzing my thesis, regarding why I initially wanted to do the project and what my reasons are now. I was initially hungry to learn and conqueror my desire to fulfill my ministry. I now am humbled and hungry to fulfill his mission, one person at a time. I desire to have a heart that looks like my God. I desire justice, peace and love for everyone. The self discovery element of this project has helped me to put the pieces together and bring forth a complete project. I realize why I felt disempowered and what makes me feel empowered. One part of that empowerment was discovering my own voice, and that helps me to empower other women. All of these components, in actuality, helped prepare me for chapter six of my thesis. I have never felt more in tune with my

project, and I have become the very thing I researched, prayed over and breathed in for the last few years.

APPENDIX A

PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Doctoral Research Project

Partial fulfillment for the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Michelle Caple Taylor

PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This is to certify that I, _____, Participant of this group understand that any information (written, verbal or other form) obtained during the performance of my duties must remain confidential. This includes all information about members, volunteers, families, employees and other associate organizations, as well as any other information otherwise marked or known to be confidential.

I understand that any unauthorized release or carelessness in the handling of this confidential information is considered a breach of the duty to maintain confidentiality.

I further understand that any breach of the duty to maintain confidentiality could be grounds for immediate dismissal and/or possible liability in any legal action arising from such breach.

_____

Signature of Participant

_____

Date

_____

Signature of Facilitator

_____

APPENDIX B

ICE BREAKER

ICEBREAKER

1. If your life was turned into a feature length movie, who would play you and why?

2. If you talk in your sleep, what would you say?

3. If you were invisible where would you go?

4. If you could be any animal what would you be?

5. If you were a nationality other than your own which would you choose? Why?

APPENDIX C

PRE TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

PRE TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Ten participants engaged in a pre test survey. The following lists eight questions the participants and a scale for interpreting the analysis. Each question is worth ten points.

SA=Strongly Agree

A=Agree

N=Neutral/No Opinion

D=Disagree

SD=Strongly Disagree

1. Do you believe there are valid reasons not to ordain women?
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. Do you believe there is any validity to the writings of Paul based on the questioning of the authenticity of the Pauline letters?
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. Do you think the social-economic and political aspects of the past bear the infliction of bias towards women of the church today? I.E. inability to vote, seen as subordinate to men, home makers, helpmate, race, gender, class.
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. Do you believe questioning any biblical text is inappropriate or unorthodox because it is the word of God?
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. Do you feel like you have discovered your spiritual gift and purpose?
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. Do you feel empowered to help other women discover their spiritual gift and purpose?
   Strongly Agree Agree No Opinion Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. Do the stories of the women in the bible leave you feeling uplifted and loved by God or downtrodden and sadden by the experience of the character?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. Do you contribute the violence against women indicative to the truth about patriarchy?

Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX D

PRE TEST SURVEY RESULTS

PRE TEST SURVEY RESULTS

	SA	A	NO	D	SD
1.	0%	0%	30%	60%	10%
2.	0%	10%	80%	0%	10%
3.	20%	40%	20%	20%	0%
4.	0%	30%	30%	30%	10%
5.	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%
6.	20%	20%	50%	10%	0%
7.	0%	30%	50%	20%	0%
8.	0%	30%	60%	0%	10%

APPENDIX E

ASSESSMENT TEST QUESTIONS

ASSESSMENT TEST QUESTIONS

1. How do you view God? What experiences have shaped that perception?
2. Describe God in your own words.
3. Write your own definition of oppression. Have you ever experienced oppression?
4. What does empowerment look like to you as a woman? In the church? Outside the church?
5. What is exegesis? What is hermeneutics?
6. Define patriarchy in your own words.

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT LESSON PLANS

PARTICIPANT LESSON PLANS

Week 1

Guides for Interpretation - OT

A. Reliability of Scripture
   1. Torah Bible
      - 22 books
      - Torah (Teaching) Prophets and the Latter Prophets
B. Christian Bible contexts
      a. Orthodox
      b. Roman
      c. Catholic

•Debates have raged within the churches with regard to the reliability of this biblical text in its various forms. The Bible can be said to be reliable if it can be reasonably claimed that its contents as preserved through the centuries are, in substance, what the original writers spoke and said. None of the original writings have been preserved. The concensus of the biblical scholarship is that readers do indeed have reason to accept current translations of the Bible as close approximations to what the biblical authors said and wrote. Contemporary translations of the Bible work from published critical or scholarly editions of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek text. With the discovery of the Dead Scrolls, a large collection of additional manuscripts of the OT is available to compare with later Hebrew manuscripts, offering further confirmation of the general reliability of our biblical text.

•The Dead Scrolls were discovered and began to be published in 1947 and 1948. Scholars through the centuries have noted the differences between the medieval Hebrew text of the Hebrew Bible and the text that lies behind the Greek translation made in Egypt by the 2nd century. BCE, known as the Septuagint (LXX).

•By the close of the 2nd cent. BCE the entire Hebrew Bible was probably available in Greek, although the several Greek renderings of the various parts of the Hebrew Scriptures were not standardized until the Christian era. The importance of the Greek translation for the early Christian community is unmistakable: Paul's letters quote from the Greek translation.

The Greek New Testament

•The NT books were written in Hellenistic Greek, a development from the classical Greek of earlier times. Official church bodies determined just what books belonged in the NT. While there was disagreement about particular books (the book of Revelations , for example, and the letter to the Laodiceans), a consensus among most church bodies was in place by the 3rd Cent. CE. Hundreds of manuscripts of the NT and of portions of it have survived from early centuries. The text of the NT differs in a number of ways among these manuscripts, but the differences are minor. The NT text is extremely well secured from early times

•The Authorized or King James Version of the Bible, published in 1611, soon thereafter came to be the preferred English translation for the English-speaking Christian community. Not until 1881-85 was this great Bible translations completely revised, despite the fact that its translation of the NT had been long known to rest upon late and faulty manuscripts. Manuscript discoveries, international studies of the biblical text and its likely meanings, and developments in English style and usage all made it appropriate for new translations to be undertaken. The English revised version of 1881-85 proved unsatisfactory to many in north America, leading to the production of the American standard edition of the revised version, published in 1901. Both of these translations were revision of the King James version.

•The university of Chicago published and entirely new translation in 1931, with the apocrypha added in 1939, a version widely used to this day. In the united states, the Federal Council of Churches, which owned the copyright of the American Standard edition, authorized a revision of the King James Version and its earlier revisions and appointed a committee to do the work. The revised standard version was the result–a translation still widely used and honored. The NT appeared in 1946, the OT in 1952, and the Apocrypha in 1957. The RSV continued to hold in general to the word order of the Hebrew and Greek originals. Other English translations quickly followed.

•Translators of the Bible have two major options in carrying through their work. They may decide to render the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek text into a contemporary language by reproducing the text in a form as close to the original form as possible, or they may set out to produce a translation that provided the equivalent of the ancient text in contemporary English form, style, and thought (often called dynamic equivalence)Those who set out to re-create the text in contemporary English will also have one particular temptation: they will necessarily have to guess at the precise meaning of the terms and idioms and allusions as they seek contemporary equivalent of these, which will almost surely lead to over-translations – translations that make the text clear than the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek actually are. On the other hand, biblical language, imagery, and

thought will run the risk of leaving readers puzzling over terms, idioms, and ideas. It is good indeed that excellent translations of both kinds are currently available. Hundreds of thousands of scholars have worked for centuries to examine and evaluate the received text of the OT, the Apocrypha, and the NT. The discovery and publication of the Dead Scrolls and other manuscript findings have demonstrated over and again that the Jewish and Christian scholars who for centuries copied and passed along the documents that we call the Bible did so faithfully and well.

Authority of the Bible

•The concept of authority, overlaps with such concepts as reliability, inerrancy, inspiration and interpretation, and canonization. It may suggest domination of the text over the reader or release of the reader from the domination of the church and tradition. It may conjure up power imposed or freedom extended. In short, the phrase. The authority of the Bible' lacks the authority of definition.

•Word of God - Traditionally the phrase has meant the Bible is the word of God. The meaning relates etymologically to the Latin verb augere, to create. The noun from auctor, from which comes the English word author, signifies creator. In its entrenched usage, then authority is authorial power. From ancient times on, individuals and communities of faith have adhered to the authority of the Bible because they believe that God created it. God is its author. For some believers this idea assumes literal form. God spe the words of the Bible to Moses, face to face, and to others who followed Moses. In turn, these recipients worked as scribes or mediators. The words that they transmitted equal the word of God. Accordingly, the Bible is authoritative, inspired, and inerrant. In time, biblical scholars took up the task. They explored the date, composition, setting, and historical accuracy of the various books. By the 19th century their research disclosed a long, muddled, and complex process of development that eventually produced the Scriptures of Jews and Christians. The results of the research rendered untenable the view that God dictated the Bible to ancient scribes. To the contrary, its authors were many, not one, and human, not divine. The Bible then became, then, the human medium for divine revelation. By drawing upon new insights and new knowledge, this perspective gave new meaning to the phrase "the authority of the Bible.

Now we have the authorial speech and authorial intent."

Introducing Exegesis

Whenever we try and understand something we heard or read, we exegete the text. doing exegesis. The Term exegesis comes from the Greek verb exegeomai, which literally means to lead.

When we do not exercise any critical judgment or allowing the text to speak on its own terms we engage in exegesis, an interpretive practice which we read our own traditions and opinions into the text, rather than listening to what the text itself actually says.

The task of Exegesis

The Seven elements method are:

1. Survey—preparation and overview
2. Contextual analysis—consideration of the historical and literary contexts of the text
3. Formal analysis—of the form, structure, and movement of the text
4. Detailed analysis—of the various parts of the text
5. Synthesis—of the text as a whole
6. Reflection—on the text today
7. Expansion and refinement—of the initial exegesis

The Diachronic Approach (meaning across time) approach and it focuses on the origin and development of a text, employing methods designed to uncover these aspects of it.

Historical–critical method (Elements of Biblical Exegesis)

1. Textual criticism—the quest for the original wording of the text (and the ways later scribes altered it)
2. Historical linguistics—the quest to understand words, idioms, grammatical forms, and the relationships among these items, often with attention to their historical development within a language
3. Form criticism—the quest for the original type of oral or written tradition reflected in the text, and for determining out of what sort of situation such a tradition might have developed
4. Tradition criticism—the quest for understanding the growth of a tradition over time from its original form to its incorporation in the final text.
5. Source criticism—the quest for the written sources used in the text
6. Redaction criticism—the quest for perceiving the ways in which the final author of the text purposefully adopted and adapted sources.

Exegetes of a sacred text takes into account the mutual influence between scripture and tradition. Things to take into consideration is changes made by scribes may be intentional and unintentional.

Unintentional are errors include both hearing and reading mistakes scribes made as they copied manuscripts.

A scribe may skip a word or a line (called haplography) write a word or a line twice (called dittography") miss spell a word, reverse the order or the letters within a single word, or reverse the order of words within a sentence.

Intentional changes in the wording in the text could occur for a variety of reasons. A scribe might feel compelled to correct the spelling or improve the grammar of a manuscript being copied.

The above information was obtained using The New Interpreter's Study Bible

Week 2

Question 1: Do you believe there are valid reasons not to ordain women?

You Tube Video: Faces of Faith—Ordination Debate

Why Does the Church Not Ordain Women as Priests?

By: Msgr. Charles Pope

The Catholic Church does not ordain women as priests. Why is this so and how can the Church continue in a policy that seems so unfair and at variance with the fact that most other denominations now have women ministers?

This question is frequently asked today and seems more urgent when, as you note, other denominations have women ministers. There is also today there is a stronger sense that every opportunity should be available to everyone.

The most immediate answer as to why the Church does not ordain to the priesthood is that the Church *cannot* do so. Sometimes we think today that our Church is free to do whatever she wants. But the fact is that the Church is bound to hand on what she has received. When Jesus established the priesthood he chose from all his many disciples (which included many prominent women) twelve men whom he named "Apostles." This call of the Apostles is the origin of the priesthood. Jesus called only men to this office. It is hard to argue, as some do, that Jesus had to comply with the norms of his day and thus had no real choice. The fact is that Jesus broke many conventions of his time and exhibited considerable freedom in interpreting the Law. He was more than willing to engage in controversy where necessary. Jesus himself established the priesthood calling only men and thus the Church in fact has no authority to over-rule Jesus, Sacred Scripture or the established Apostolic Tradition in this regard. Both John Paul II and Paul VI indicated this very clearly. Here is What Pope John Paul wrote in 1994: *Therefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.* (Ordinatio Sacerdotalis, 4). So, the Church must hand on what we have received from Christ and the Apostles even if this teaching is not currently popular with all or in conformity with other modern practices.

As to the question of fairness, it is possible to observe differences in regard to roles in the Church without an indication of inequality. Whatever role individuals serve in the Church, nevertheless, all are equally baptized, equally children of the Father and equal in dignity. Is this not what Paul wrote: in First Corinthians 12:*[14]Now the body is not made*

up of one part but of many. [15]If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body....[17]If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? [18]But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.... [21]The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

9 Responses

1. *Therese* says:

   From a purely pragmatic and tongue-in-cheek perspective, we women should remember that God always selects the weakest vessels to remind us that it is he who acts through us that accomplishes all things in Christ, not us. So the fact that Jesus selected men means women are the stronger sex. We came second and are indeed the improved model: we need less food, we need less oxygen, we conserve (and store!) calories better, we live longer, we can multitask, and we can get men to take the garbage out and think it is a privilege! Beyond that think about this: the national productivity per person rose dramatically when women entered the work force. I suspect the real reason men objected was that they did not want us to find out how much work they were not doing

   Given all this, I have no doubt that it was entirely intentional that the priesthood was reserved for men: it demonstrates the power of God that the church carries on despite those weak vessels being in charge. Further if we were in charge, I doubt many would show up at all. They'd be happy to go fishing on Sundays and leave the work to us.

   This just proves again that God knows us better than we know ourselves!

   - *Msgr. Charles Pope* says:

     Thanks Therese I am well aware that as St. Paul says, I carry this treasure (of the priesthood) in an earthen vessel!
     Msgr. Pope

   - *Thomas Hampton* says:

     Therese, I do not know you nor you I. I was a little confused by your remarks. They seemed to be passive aggressive in that you say you support men only as priests, but then you go on to extol all the virtues of women and then trash Christian men. Forgive me if you are just joking around, but your remarks reveal that you have some conflict on this issue.

2. *rr* says:

On Fr. Roy's point that "..women were chosen by God to be the first to witness the resurrection and to bring the news to others…". An often overlooked point is that back in those days, women were not 'trusted' as witnesses, and the fact that the Bible states this to be so, not only tells us the breaking of another 'convention' but even more importantly, that the resurrection truly occurred ! (otherwise, the author would have used men as witnesses in the telling of this story).

As with many things in life, it is the heart and not the mind with which one argues.

- *Msgr. Charles Pope* says:

  It remains true that Jesus broke many conventions of his Day. Thus, Had he wished to call women to be Apostles (priests) he surely could have, but the Bible says he did not. The position of the Church in not extending Ordination to women is ultimately a matter of humilty. THere are just some things the Church cannot do. THis is what recent popes have all said. We cannot simply over-rule Scripture. I am glad to belong to a Church that does not overstep. I don't know if this is a matter of the heart or the mind. I hope it is both!

3. *Fr. Joe Jenkins* says:

"The most immediate answer as to why the Church does not ordain to the priesthood is that the Church cannot do so." That really says it all. We must remain true to the apostolic tradition. Equality in grace and holiness does not oblige entry into holy orders. Baptismal priesthood and the ordained priesthood are different animals.

There is no social justice issue because a vocation to the priesthood cannot be earned or merited. It is a gift from God. Just because a woman might think she should be a priest holds no weight whatsoever. Even most men are not called to the priesthood and some who think they are called may be found unfit and/or called to something else. The Church herself must authenticate the calling to the priesthood. It is a sacrament and the sacraments belong to the Church and are governed by the bishops and Pope.

Gender is not an accidental but is a core element to our personhood. Those who deny this are falling into the old heresies against matter. The ancient Gnostics had women priests, but they were not Christian. The incarnation itself is threatened by such wrong-minded revisionists. They reduce our Lord to a myth and reimage him as a female upon the cross. The passion is likened to a rape and the Romans to the males in the Church who supposedly oppress them. It is all quite ludicrous.

The priest stands at the altar as "another Christ" and he acts "in the person of Christ, head of the Church." The priest signifies our Lord the bridegroom and the congregation stands as his bride, the Church. A woman priest (actually the word is "priestess," a pagan designation) would breech this symbolism and it would illustrate a bizarre sacramental lesbianism of a bride to bride relationship. We really do not want to go there, and if anyone does, there is still the Episcopal community (Church?), although it is sinking fast.

If the Church should ordain women and it is not the will of Christ, the heart of the Church would be destroyed. A false priest cannot consecrate the bread and wine. The sacrifice would be a sham. We would forfeit the Eucharist, Confession and Absolution, and the Priesthood. The stakes are too high. If there was the slightest uncertainty, we could not do it. As things stand, Pope John Paul II has spoken through his Magisterium and there can be no doubt. It is not the will of Christ that women be ordained priests. This is immutable.

The priesthood serves men and women. All benefit from it. But only a very select few are called to be ordained.

As for the allegation that priestesses would have forestalled the pedophile crisis, this is nonsense. Even convents with nuns have faced charges. Women may have a heightened capacity for holiness, but their potential for mischief and sin is no better than that of men. Remember, it was Eve who gave Adam the apple.

4. *victor* says:

I would like to compare this debate, with strong and firm views held on either side to consider the anology of Paul when he writes thus:

"I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not mean at all the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actuially I wrote you not to associate with any so called brother if he should be an immoral person or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviller or a drunkard, or a swindler – not even to eat with such one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves"

Paul says we are to not associate with those who are inside the church who are immoral..wow harsh..not even to eat with them. I think we have a hard time understanding as we Christians are called to be IN the WORLD not OFF the world. In fact there are the 2 extremes. One, who get caught up on the " NOT OFF" part.. and they cut themselves off, from the world. And then the others who get caught on being " IN the WORLD" both are equally wrong. We are suppose to be different, set apart.. but still living in this world.

SIMILARLY THERE ARE OTHER examples like this regarding the consumption of food. Now I do not partake of meat of the swines as the demons went to reside there, where as my daughter finds no fault in it and says ' what God has blessed and created do not call it unclean'

So I am in the same boat as the church in finding out God's will for mankind by assuming my concepts to be just.

I surely know that I am in the realm of man's wisdom. But what is God's wisdom?

5. *Cynthia* says:

Thank you Mgsr. Pope for the courage to defend the teachings of Christ and his Church. I particularly appreciate the fact that you told Fr. Roy, that he has a right to his counscience, but he has no right to lead the faithful astray. He was ordained a priest to preach the gospel of Christ and not to preach his own ideas and thoughts.

The vast majority of Catholics, both men and women, understand the teachings of Christ and his church. I wonder how anyone, let alone a priest, can say that for 2000 years, the Church of Christ has been wrong in reserving priestly ordination to men. So many things have changed in the church and the church is in constant reformation. It is most mind blowing that if this was an injustice, the first apostles did not realize it, neither Paul, all the great men and women of the church's history never realized the injustice. It has only taken people like Fr. Roy and the distracted nuns to figure this out. If they so believe this, I believe that the most noble thing to do is to establish their own church, where they can preach and practice what they think is right.

Talking about our Lord Jesus breaking the customs of his time, it is a known fact that there were many Greek and Roman$ priestesses during his time on earth. There were also Goddess. So it would never have been an issue if Christ really wanted to have women as priests in his new covenant community.

Talking about the women at the resurrection, this only proves the fact that Jesus did not mean to discriminate anyone. He showed himself to a woman and asked her to go and inform "his brothers" the priest of the new covenant-the twelve men he chose from among his man followers and disciples to be apostles. It is from this apostles that the church understands the origin of the priesthood.

Fr. Roy wrongly says that the resurrection marked the origin of the priesthood, as a lay person in the church, I am seriously applauded to hear a priest say that. Where did he learn his theology. One does not even need to study theology to

know that. Christ choose twelve men and at the last supper, he commissioned them to do this in memory of him.

Except Fr.Roy and those who disagree with the church on this issue want to claim that Christ was subject to earthly practices and authority or that he did not know what he was doing. I am not surprised, because there have been some crazy theology going around that our Lord Jesus did not know who he was and did not fully understand his mission. It is only a theology such as these, that can claim that Christ was only following the standard of his time.

I recently read in the website of the leadership conference of women religious (LCWR) where some of the sisters said that they have gone beyond the "Jesus Narrative". This is really painful to hear, because these women are supposed to be faithful daughters of Christ and his body the Church. It is only a person who has transcended Christ who can claim that he was limited.

Imagine a very important issue like the Eucharist and the Priesthood, if Christ wanted women to be priests, he would have broken the so-called standard of his time. If he could touch lepers, eat with sinners, allow a woman to touch him, chose a woman to reveal his resurrection, how could he not break the standard of the time and choose woman to be his priests.

It is also very funny to hear Fr. Roy try to add some flesh to his argument by saying that if there were women priests, they would have spoken out on the outrageous abuse of children. This is very lame and malicious of the priest, because there have been many, many cases of abuse of children by woman religious and the authorities said nothing. Nuns too have been accused and convicted of abuse, what did their superiors do at the time of the abuse? So one can see that this is just a way of trying to add weight to the lame argument for ordination of women as priests.

At the end of the day, everyone who listens to the explanation of the Church and understands the scriptures, will know that reserving priestly ordination to men has nothing to do with injustice, sexism, discrimination or the dignity of women. It is only about keeping to the will of Christ and the tradition of the Church.

The scriptures talks of very many prominent women in the scriptures who did great work of evangelization in the early church, who also helped the apostles to spread the faith. Why did the apostles not ordain this women?

May our Lord God who is always with his church, continue to guide and see us through, Amen.

6. *Thomas Hampton* says:

Do not be deceived. This is Satan at work. He deceived Eve with crafty words that played on her gullibility, and he has been campaigning for women to leave the home and work when they have children and to divorce when husband does not fill her dreams like a romance novel hero. It is no coincidence that the debate over women in the priesthood advanced in lock-step with feminism. The devil hates families and wants to see them destroyed, because when a family dies by divorce, the ripples of dysfunction proceed outward in all directions. 2/3 of all divorces are filed by women , and the divorce rate in the American Churches is a s high as secular society. What shame we bring on ourselves for caving in time and again to a feminist culture that is killing our country by every measurable societal ill. Satan laughs and Jesus weeps.

I have read all of the Apostle Paul's references in 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-14, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:5-9 and Acts 21:9, Acts 18:18, Romans 16:1-4, Romans 16:7; 1 Cor. 16:19, Philippians 4:2–3 Ephesians 4:11-13.

When I compare all those scripture, the overarching principle I see that ties it all together is that women cannot teach or lead in the official duties within the congregation. These roles are reserved for men. I do see, though, that women can engage in the ministry and evangelical work of spreading the good news and even prophesizing.

I do think that Priscilla was under Aquila's headship, and they always are mentioned together. Woman have many important and honorable roles to play in the congregation. Our position of prohibition for women as Deacon, Priests, and Elders is not rooted in Misogyny, or chauvinism nor is it a simple tradition or custom. We follow God's inspired word with all sincerity.

Shame on the Churches for caving in to the tool of the devil—feminism. Feminism was good and right for the issues of the Suffrage movement. Beyond that it is a cancer on society, and more specifically the American Churches. I am just a fool trying to work out my salvation with fear and trembling. I share with you for what it is worth.

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Week 3

Question 2: Do you believe there is any validity to the writings of Paul based on the questioning of the authenticity of the Pauline letters?

The Deutero-Pauline Letters
by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D.

http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Paul-Disputed.htm,

Letters attributed to St. Paul:

Of the thirteen NT letters *attributed* to Paul, most scholars today distinguish between two groups: those written by Paul himself vs. those written by his followers. However, since not all scholars are in agreement regarding the authorship of certain letters, rather than calling the two groups the "true" letters vs. the "false" ones, it is better to distinguish between the "undisputed" letters vs. the "disputed" ones.

- The seven "Undisputed Letters" (a.k.a. the "*Authentic Pauline Letters*").
  - These can be put into three subgroups chronologically:
    - *The Earliest Letter* (ca. 50-51 AD): 1 Thessalonians
    - *The Middle Letters* (mid 50's): 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, Galatians
    - *The Latest Letter* (ca. 57-58 AD): Romans
  - About 95-99% of scholars today agree that all of these letters were actually written by Paul himself.

- The six "Disputed Letters" (a.k.a. the "*Deutero-Pauline Epistles*").
  - For two of these, the scholarly divide is about 50/50 (that is, about 50% of scholars think they were written by Paul himself, while the other 50% think they are "pseudepigraphic" or written later by a follower of Paul):
    - If 2 Thessalonians is authentic, Paul probably wrote it *soon after* 1 Thess (in order to correct some misunderstandings caused by 1 Thess itself), since it is so *similar* in form and content to 1 Thess.
    - If Colossians is authentic, Paul probably wrote it *near the end of his life* (after spending several years in prison), since the theology expressed in it is rather *different* from Paul's earlier letters.
    - If either or both of these letters are pseudepigraphic, then they were probably written in the last few decades of the first Christian century.
  - For the other four letters, about 80% of scholars think they were *not* written by Paul himself, but by one of his followers after his death:
    - Ephesians is almost definitely a later expansion of Colossians, since they are so similar in structure and theology, but quite different from Paul's earlier letters; Ephesians was probably

written to serve as a "cover letter" for an early collection of Pauline letters.
        - The Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) were most likely written late in the first century by some member(s) of the "Pauline School" who wanted to adapt his teachings to changing circumstances.
    - Note: Judging a particular letter to be pseudepigraphic does *not* mean that it is any less valuable than the other letters, but only that it was written later by someone other than Paul.
        - All thirteen of the letters attributed to Paul are still considered "canonical"; all of them are still part of the Holy Bible and foundational for the Christian Church.
        - Distinguishing the letters based on actual authorship, however, allows scholars to see more clearly the *development* of early Christian theology and practice.

- The so-called Epistle to the Hebrews is definitely *not* written by Paul, and is *not* even explicitly *attributed* to him.
    - For centuries, many Christians counted it as the fourteenth work in the Pauline corpus, mainly because the epistolary ending mentions Timothy, Paul's closest associate (see Heb 13:23).
    - However, contrary to all other letters and epistles, the opening of Hebrews does not name its author at all.
    - In literary genre, therefore, Hebrews is not really a "letter"; rather, it is a "homily" (a scripture-based sermon).

Week 4

Do you think the social-economic and political aspects of the past bear the infliction of bias towards women of the church today? I.E. inability to vote, seen as subordinate to men, home makers, helpmate, race, gender, class.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND JOURNAL OF MRS JARENA LEE, GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF HER CALL TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

Mrs Jarena Lee , Preacher of the A.M.E. Church, Aged 60 years in the 11th day of the 2nd month 1844, Philadelphia 1844

Revised and Corrected from the Original Manuscript, written by herself

Philadelphia, Printed and Published for the Author, 1849

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1836

by JARENA LEE,

In the Office of the Clerk of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania

A. My Call To Preach
B. My Marriage
C. The Subject of my Call to Preach Renewed

Week 5

Do you believe questioning any bliblical text is inappropriate or unorthodox because it is the word of God?

THINK ABOUT IT
Is It Wrong for Christians to Question God?
By Laura J. Bagby

CBN.com Since this very same question has been asked by some of my Christian brothers and sisters and even myself, I decided to see how the Bible handles this question.

Some believe that to question the Bible, God's direction, or even God Himself is tantamount to blasphemy or, on a smaller scale, a sign of disbelief.

I think it all goes back to motive. Why are we questioning God on some particular issue or doctrine or direction? If it is simply because we are trying to stall our obedience to the Lord, then we had best quit; if it is coming from a prideful heart that says, 'I know better than God,' then we are wrong to question; if we question God's authority, then that too is incorrect behavior on our part.

If, however, we question because we desperately want to know the answer, because we desperately want to know who our Lord truly is, because we need to see the light in the midst of our own confusion, then I believe it is appropriate.

I think there is a significant difference between questioning that brings wisdom and a fuller understanding of God and the kind of questioning that simply seeks to validate man and man's ways.

Wanting to Go God's Way

First let's look at those who question as a means of understanding God's ways.

In Judges 6, we see that the Israelites had been severely oppressed by the Midianites for the past seven years. Countless times, the Midianites would ravage the crops and the livestock, leaving the countryside totally impoverished.

Then, an angel of the Lord appeared to a prophet who happened to be threshing wheat in a winepress. His name was Gideon. Threshing wheat sounds fairly noble, but the reality was Gideon was hunkered down in a winepress because he was afraid the Midianites would see what he was doing and ransack his grain. He was undercover, so to speak.

The angel greets Gideon, calling him a "mighty warrior" (**Judges 6:12**). But before the angel can instruct Gideon in the way of the Lord, Gideon interrupts with a barrage of questions.

In Judges 6:13-14 (NIV) we read:

"But sir," Gideon replied, "if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian."

Gideon just questioned God's goodness, His power, and His promises. That is pretty heavy. The amazing thing is that the Lord did not chastise Gideon's questioning spirit. Rather, He answers Gideon with a task to accomplish.

Gideon is not excited about this new revelation. Why? He isn't sure that he really heard the Lord. Repeatedly Gideon falters when told that he is the one God has appointed to save Israel from the Midianites, and repeatedly the angel of the Lord says that God will be with Gideon.

Eventually, a still distraught Gideon has to know for certain that the Lord had truly spoken to him and that this really was the will of God. So, he runs and puts together an offering of bread and a goat and brings them before the angel. According to instructions given by the angel, Gideon puts the meat and the bread on a rock and the angel touches the offering with Gideon's staff—and boom!—both are consumed by fire. Gideon believes.

I can think of many more examples of some very godly men and women who struggled with God's will just as much as Gideon -- Moses, Abraham, Sarah, Job, doubting Thomas, Peter, etc. And though their questioning might have made them falter and might have caused them to wait longer for a promise to be fulfilled or do the right thing, God was with them because He knew that when it came right down to it, these men and women desired to serve God. They just needed to think outside of the box. They needed to gain the right perspective. They needed a lot of encouragement.

Wanting to Go Our Own Way

There are cases when questioning is a sign of an unchanged and unrepentant heart, however. Take the case of the questioning sessions instigated by the Pharisees in the New Testament. These sessions were a means to prove Jesus wrong and validate their own desires and philosophies. How arrogant they must have seemed to our Lord.

If your heart is humble before the Lord, not self-righteous, and if you acknowledge God as being the one in control with your best in mind, then don't be afraid to question, just make sure that when you ask, you are seeking for answers in the right place. You can't question God's will and expect him to honor it if you aren't willing to hear the answer.

Listening comes in several forms, but all forms start with a submissive and receptive heart. We must be humble before God.

We need to have an open Bible before us. Many times I am guilty of asking for better understanding or direction, for a reason why I must do what it seems God wants me to do, and instead of prayerfully and calmly sitting at the feet of Jesus and soaking in His Word, I am either repeating my question adamantly (I figure God didn't hear me the first time), or I am complaining and feeling sorry for myself, or I am seeking for the answers through other literature rather than the Bible. It is pretty obvious I am not in the right attitude to listen to God.

There is nothing wrong with asking for wisdom. If we don't understand, we need to pray for wisdom as it says in James chapter 1, believing that God will give it to us. Once we know the answer, then we must put it into practice.

The Concept of "Ethnarchy"

Eastern Orthodoxy has a unique institution in its history, known as "ethnarchy," which appears to contradict nearly everything which has been noted above about the Church's attitude regarding practical involvement. "Ethnarchy" occurs when the highest ecclesiastical leader of the church in a given area assumes political leadership. An excellent embodiment of the principles of "ethnarchy" was the assumption of authority as chief-of-state of Greece by Archbishop Damaskinos following the German withdrawal at the end of World War II. The most recent case was the assumption of the presidency of Cyprus by Archbishop Makarios.

This rarely practiced institution occurs only in periods of crisis, when lay civil leaders cannot, because of extraordinary reasons, exercise normal political powers. When only a Church leader seems to be able to embody the identity of the people of the nation, the hierarch may assume political and government leadership by general consensus. It is all-important that such an exercise of political power should be only temporary and exceptional, until the regrouping of political forces in the nation allows the resumption of power by the lay leaders of the nation.

Women's Rights

Another important area of human rights concerns is the women's liberation issue. The Church has attempted to avoid the reactionary male chauvinist stance, no less than a shrill feminism. The balance between recognition and practical support of the basic human rights of women on the one hand, and the great concern for the role of women in family life on the other, has produced a not-so-easy to categorize stance on the part of the Church. It is probably most sharply illustrated by the actions of the 1980 Clergy-Laity Congress of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese on the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. The original report of the Social and Moral Issues Committee recommended the endorsement of the ERA. When taken to the floor for debate and action, it was clear that the Congress members did not want to endorse the constitutional amendment. For all of that, the Congress finally passed a statement which used the very words of the amendment, saying:

"... we believe and support the proposition that equality of rights shall not be denied or abridged under the terms of any law solely because of sex."

The Orthodox are adamantly opposed to the ordination of women as liturgical clergy. There have been articles and books by both men and women theologians supporting this stand. At present, there is no movement within Orthodoxy for this innovation.

The place, role, and significance of women in the life of the Church have become important concerns. In 1976, a conference on the topic was held in Romania, with participation of Orthodox women from all over the world. The results were published in a book entitled *Orthodox Women: Their Role and Participation in the Orthodox Church.* A similar conference was held on the topic of "Theological Anthropology: Towards a Theology of Human Wholeness (Female/Male)" in Niederaltaich in 1980. Other conferences on this question have been held in Sheffield, England, and at St. Vladimir's Seminary in Crestwood, N.Y., all held with the endorsement of the Church's hierarchy.

Women are now being trained in theology in Orthodox seminaries, both in Europe and the United States, where women have been degree candidates and graduates at both of the accredited seminaries, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts, and at St. Vladimir's. One of the topics of discussion is the reconstitution of the ancient order of deaconesses. Theological studies have been undertaken on the topic in Greece, and a school for deaconesses has been established, but the formalization of the institution is yet to be realized.

Week 6 and Week 7

Bible Study Hagar in the Wilderness

A. Genesis 16: 1-6 Hagar's predicament and Genesis 21: 9-21 God's response to Hagar

   • A way out of New Way

   • Perseverance of everyday black women

   • Generational traditions

B. The negative portrayal of black women

   • Patriarchal and androcentric ally biased liturgy and leadership

- From Freedom to Slavery
- Hagar's story – A route to Black women's issues

C. The wilderness experience

- Naming Black women oppression
- Interpretation of Slavery
- Hagar's Yahweh/Abraham God

D. Naming black women's experience

- Postbellum Black People
- Social Role Surrogacy
- From Motherhood to Slavery

E. Defining patriarchy

F. "Womanist" reflections

Week 8

Do you feel like you have discovered your spiritual gift and purpose?

Do you feel empowered to help other women discover their spiritual gift and purpose?

Living In Purpose (INSTRUCTOR COPY)

In this book I use a Little bit of space to give some life experiences of trying to find my purpose and the trials I faced and then some space to take you into a place of emotions with poetry. My reasoning for doing this was to give you the place and then take you there. Because trying to live in purpose is something bigger than you and I because it is not the place Satan would have you to be but it is exactly the place God will have us to be.

That is why the word says we wrestle not against, etc. So, today, I hope to leave here today and meet my objective to help you Walk into your purpose and allow you to live in Purpose.

11 Corinthians 9:8 – "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, abound to ever good work:"

This scripture is telling us that we are to live willingly, live as a full participant, whole heartily and to the will of God and not grudgeliy or half heartily to what we are doing. And if you do that and give bountifully in whatever aspect you are committed to then you will reap bountifully but if you sew sparely then you will reap the same, sparely.

Why, because 1 Cor: 9:17 says, "For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me."

In others words, I can do it having pleasure and the rewards of doing the will of God or I can do it having it as a task set before me but I am still required to do the will of God. So, why not do it looking for to be partakers of the hope and the rewards set before us.

1: Corinthians 9:10 (NLT) – "Wasn't he actually speaking to us? Yes, it is written for us, so that the one who plows and the one who threshes the grain might both expect a share of the harvest."

You should work to fulfill the Will of God but also expect to be partakers of the reward with Hope.

So the first step to living in Purpose it to have the mindset and be prepared to be committed to walk in purpose, which means being fully committed to the will of God for your life.

Before venturing into how to live in purpose, let's determine 1st what is the definition of purpose,

Purpose is,

The reason for which something exists or happens. (2) An intended or desired result, end, aim, or goal. "Intentionally"

_____

_____

_____

_____

And what does God say concerning purpose? (Participants) (Question and answers)

Perhaps our purpose is to give him praise, worship him, go out and be fruitful (productive) and multiply the earth, go out and make disciples in all the earth that they too may also be saved.

In whatever reason, you praise through adoration and praise of singing, praying, spending time with God, being holy and acceptable towards him, worship through time, giving, service, etc. You are fruitful through your jobs, your actions, time, tithe, once again, etc. multiply by teaching, birth, physical birth, making disciples, etc. so in short, therefore your purpose could be anything from cleaning to being a lawyer, but the goal is to make effective discipleships throughout the world through the will and ways of God. Whatever you do, do it to the will of God.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:31 – "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." And the Bible speaks on by example if you went to an unbeliever house who has offered you his food that was offered up to Idols. Then it is up to your conscience to reject the food and say it was offered up to Idols or you can bless the food and believe God has blessed that thing in which you partake of with no offense to the one who offered you food. Because why should you not eat because of the beliefs of others? Why should my freedom be limited by what someone else thinks? So, eat and thank God for the glory for his provision.

The word says the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. Then we should not become so entangled in the affairs of this world and what others say concerning the things we do as long as we do it to the glory of God. Whatever you do is not always going to be what the world figured as your purpose but if God has ordained you to do this thing, then do it to his glory.

So for example,

What is your Profession?

_____

_____

Use the jobs given – if you are in cleaning, you should do it to the will of God, meaning scripture do it to the glory of God. And if you are a lawyer, do it to the glory of God, why?

Everything you do should be what you desire for yourself and what you want to put out in the earth to come back to you. The reasoning being that everything done should be for someone else in mind and not of yourselves that someone else may see the goodness and glory of God and be saved.

In order to live on purpose we must have a Manuel, and our Manuel is the Bible and what does the bible say,

Matthew 6:33 – "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 22:37-40 – "Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The reason is because God knows that seeking him first would lead you into your purpose because we can't live a life outside our creator nor have a plan to our purpose if we do not know whose image we are created in and who to immaculate in living a purposed fill life.

Also, in loving God with all our heart, etc. and our neighbor, we wouldn't cause harm to ourselves, or want anything less for ourselves,

So, in order to live in purpose you have to use the Bible as a Manuel in order to free yourselves to live in purpose accordingly to the will of God.

God can't bless you if you have a tight hand, if you can't be a blessing then God can't bless you. Which means, you can't walk through a closed door, the door needs to be opened in order for you to walk through it and that is the same analogy with God? He can't pour into your life if you are not willing to pour out so that he can pour in.

Now in order to set yourselves up to live in purpose, there are some other pertinent questions you have to ask yourself. The first being,

Why do you exist? What do you believe to be the reason for your existence? Participants and questions and answers, in other words what is your explanation of your existence individually.

Read the part from book. Ex. I believe I am here to be an author, to write and to preach. It sounds like it's a lot but it is all in one. I write, I preach what I write, I believe what I write and I publish what I write which makes me an author and I accepted my calling before all that, which makes me a minister of the words I write. It is all there together continuously allowing room for growth and expansion on the gifts God has given me all within that purpose to spread the good news of God in the way I believe I have been called.

_____

so, what is your answer? _____

Are you doing what you believe is your purpose for your existence? Why or why not?

_____

_____

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_____

How do I know what my purpose is?

The way you know you're your purpose is – is because God has placed a desire in your heart that you long to do and no matter where you go or do in your life if you do not do that thing which is embedded deep in your soul then you do not feel like you are doing exactly what you were meant to do because of that empty feeling in your spirit. Another thing is sometimes people do not feel anything and wonder if they have purpose, well that goes back to what do you enjoying doing in your life? What is it that you can do for free and could be totally fulfilled and happy in your life? I could write and do it for free because I love to write. I don't put any time limits on myself for how little I will write, I write as much as I can when I feel like it when I can. Then there is the very important factor that also, you pay attention to the signs. And let the Holy Spirit be a discerning spirit for you. What I mean by that is I love to sing!! Love to sing!! But it is not my calling. Now, I could go and get singing lessons and work on singing and allow God to develop that gift inside of me but I don't have the gift to sing or the natural ability to just sing. That therefore is not my calling. You will you're your calling you're your purpose in something that you are good at whether you discover you are good at it while striving to see you're your calling is or just have a natural ability to do it, you're your calling will be something that you are passionate about and also good at.

_____

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_____With that being said, does anyone know specifically what their calling is? And the reason I speak about calling is because your calling is your purpose. Those words are interchangeable.

What is your passion and what do you believe is your talent or gift?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Steps to Living in Your Purpose

1. Gather as much information and resources as you can on your desire in order to become knowledgeable on that subject.

2. Work on your purpose at least 15 minutes a day. (put commitment into play)

3. Write down your short term goal and long term goal to begin working in your purpose.

4. Take a class on your purpose. (Discipline yourself). School, smooth out the edges.

5. Take your purpose seriously so others will.

6. Keep a journal on where you are with your purpose. (Do not be at the same place a month from now.)

7. Don't push it; take your time to be perfect for your purpose.

8. Start off slow; don't be surprised about setbacks, failures, or not becoming successful in your purpose overnight.

9. The only success comes by trial and error.

10. Enjoy your life and your purpose without the agony of hating what you which in returns make you hate your life!

11. Network.

12. Focus, Focus on things you're good at.

13. Don't be lazy.

14. You are never too old to walk in your purpose.

15. Don't make excuses.

16. Don't look at society for validation.

17. Listen. (Listen for the voice of God.) Don't leave God out of the purpose he ordained for you.

Living in Purpose

What is the definition of purpose?

Purpose is,

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And what does God say concerning purpose?

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What is your Profession?

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Why do you exist? What do you believe to be the reason for your existence? In other words what is your explanation of your existence individually?

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Are you doing what you believe is your purpose for your existence? Why or why not?

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How do I know what my purpose is?

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What is your passion and what do you believe is your talent or gift?

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Steps to Living in Your Purpose

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17. _____

Empowerment Series: Living In Purpose Seminar by Power Living Consultant.
▪**Defining Purpose**
What is Purpose?
▪**Mapping out your Direction**
Where am I going?
▪**Taking the Necessary Steps**
What is my first step?
▪**Your Will**
What is God's Will for my life?
▪**Putting Things into Perspective**
Am I ready?
▪**Overview**
Walking into your Purpose

Week 9

Do the stories of the women in the Bible leave you feeling uplifted and loved by God or downtrodden and sadden by the experience of the character?

Do You contribute the violence against women indicative to the truth about patriarchy?

Violence against women

Intimate partner and sexual violence against women

Key facts:

- Violence against women - particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women - are major public health problems and violations of women's human rights.
- Recent global prevalence figures indicate that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.
- On average, 30% of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their partner.
- Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.
- Violence can result in physical, mental, sexual, reproductive health and other health problems, and may increase vulnerability to HIV.
- Risk factors for being a perpetrator include low education, exposure to child maltreatment or witnessing violence in the family, harmful use of alcohol, attitudes accepting of violence and gender inequality.
- Risk factors for being a victim of intimate partner and sexual violence include low education, witnessing violence between parents, exposure to abuse during childhood and attitudes accepting violence and gender inequality.
- In high-income settings, school-based programmes to prevent relationship violence among young people (or dating violence) are supported by some evidence of effectiveness.
- In low-income settings, other primary prevention strategies, such as microfinance combined with gender equality training and community-based initiatives that address gender inequality and communication and relationship skills, hold promise.
- Situations of conflict, post conflict and displacement may exacerbate existing violence and present new forms of violence against women."[8]

Introduction

The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Intimate partner violence refers to behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours.

Sexual violence is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object.

Scope of the problem

Population-level surveys based on reports from victims provide the most accurate estimates of the prevalence of intimate partner violence and sexual violence in non-conflict settings. The first report of the "WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women" (2005) in 10 mainly developing countries found that, among women aged 15-49:

- between 15% of women in Japan and 71% of women in Ethiopia reported physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime;
- between 0.3–11.5% of women reported experiencing sexual violence by a non-partner since the age of 15 years;
- the first sexual experience for many women was reported as forced – 17% in rural Tanzania, 24% in rural Peru, and 30% in rural Bangladesh.

A more recent analysis of WHO with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Medical Research Council, based on existing data from over 80 countries, found that globally 35% of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. Most of this violence is intimate partner violence. Worldwide, almost one third (30%) of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner, in some regions this is much higher. Globally as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners.

Intimate partner and sexual violence are mostly perpetrated by men against women and child sexual abuse affects both boys and girls. International studies reveal that approximately 20% of women and 5–10% of men report being victims of sexual violence as children. Violence among young people, including dating violence, is also a major problem.

Risk factors

Factors found to be associated with intimate partner and sexual violence occur within individuals, families and communities and wider society. Some factors are associated with being a perpetrator of violence, some are associated with experiencing violence and some are associated with both.

Risk factors for both intimate partner and sexual violence include:

- lower levels of education (perpetration of sexual violence and experience of sexual violence);
- exposure to child maltreatment (perpetration and experience);
- witnessing family violence (perpetration and experience);
- antisocial personality disorder (perpetration);
- harmful use of alcohol (perpetration and experience);
- having multiple partners or suspected by their partners of infidelity (perpetration); and
- attitudes that are accepting of violence and gender inequality (perpetration and experience).

Factors specifically associated with intimate partner violence include:

- past history of violence;
- marital discord and dissatisfaction;
- difficulties in communicating between partners.

Factors specifically associated with sexual violence perpetration include:

- beliefs in family honour and sexual purity;
- ideologies of male sexual entitlement; and
- weak legal sanctions for sexual violence.

The unequal position of women relative to men and the normative use of violence to resolve conflict are strongly associated with both intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence.

Health consequences

Intimate partner and sexual violence have serious short- and long-term physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems for survivors and for their children, and lead to high social and economic costs.

- Violence against women can have fatal results like homicide or suicide.
- It can lead to injuries, with 42% of women who experience intimate partner reporting an injury as a consequences of this violence.
- Intimate partner violence and sexual violence can lead to unintended pregnancies, induced abortions, gynaecological problems, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. The 2013 analysis found that women who had been physically or sexually abused were 1.5 times more likely to have a sexually transmitted infection and, in some regions, HIV, compared to women who have not experienced partner violence. They are also twice as likely to have an abortion.

- Intimate partner violence in pregnancy also increases the likelihood of miscarriage, stillbirth, pre-term delivery and low birth weight babies.
- These forms of violence can lead to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep difficulties, eating disorders, emotional distress and suicide attempts. The same study found that women who have experienced intimate partner violence were almost twice as likely to experience depression and problem drinking. The rate was even higher for women who had experienced non partner sexual violence.
- Health effects can also include headaches, back pain, abdominal pain, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal disorders, limited mobility and poor overall health.
- Sexual violence, particularly during childhood, can lead to increased smoking, drug and alcohol misuse, and risky sexual behaviours in later life. It is also associated with perpetration of violence (for males) and being a victim of violence (for females).

Impact on children

- Children who grow up in families where there is violence may suffer a range of behavioural and emotional disturbances. These can also be associated with perpetrating or experiencing violence later in life.
- Intimate partner violence has also been associated with higher rates of infant and child mortality and morbidity (e.g. diarrhoeal disease, malnutrition).

Social and economic costs

The social and economic costs of intimate partner and sexual violence are enormous and have ripple effects throughout society. Women may suffer isolation, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities and limited ability to care for themselves and their children.

Prevention and response

Currently, there are few interventions whose effectiveness has been proven through well designed studies. More resources are needed to strengthen the prevention of intimate partner and sexual violence, including primary prevention, i.e. stopping it from happening in the first place.

Regarding primary prevention, there is some evidence from high-income countries that school-based programmes to prevent violence within dating relationships have shown effectiveness. However, these have yet to be assessed for use in resource-poor settings. Several other primary prevention strategies: those that combine microfinance with gender equality training; that promote communication and relationship skills within couples and communities; that reduce access to, and harmful use of alcohol; and that change cultural gender norms, have shown some promise but need to be evaluated further.

To achieve lasting change, it is important to enact legislation and develop policies that:

- address discrimination against women;
- promote gender equality;
- support women; and
- help to move towards more peaceful cultural norms.

An appropriate response from the health sector can play an important role in the prevention of violence. Sensitization and education of health and other service providers is therefore another important strategy. To address fully the consequences of violence and the needs of victims/survivors requires a multi-sectoral response.

WHO actions

WHO, in collaboration with a number of partners, is:

- building the evidence base on the size and nature of violence against women in different settings and supporting countries' efforts to document and measure this violence and its consequences. This is central to understanding the magnitude and nature of the problem at a global level and to initiating action in countries;
- strengthening research and research capacity to assess interventions to address partner violence
- developing technical guidance for evidence-based intimate partner and sexual violence prevention and for strengthening the health sector responses to such violence;
- disseminating information and supporting national efforts to advance women's rights and the prevention of and response to violence against women; and
- collaborating with international agencies and organizations to reduce/eliminate violence globally.

http://www.ncadv.org/files/DomesticViolenceFactSheet(National).pdf

http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/ march 6, 2013

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW2010%20Report_by%20chapter(pdf)/violence%20against%20women.pdf

Week 11

Facilitator Extra Seminar Lesson Plan

EMPOWERING WOMEN WHO ARE CONFINED IN A TRADITIONAL CHURCH SETTING TO CONFRONT BIAS

Themes discovered

1).Women's ordination is necessary/needed/valid and sanctioned by God

2).Women have the God given right to lead in: churches, workplace and family

3).Church leaders should always speak out against all forms of abuse especially toward women

4).Liberation comes from within - we can free ourselves from oppression

5).Black women are still oppressed by the system

6).Knowledge is power

7).Questioning God is good when it causes us to grow in our faith

8).Holy Spirit is all that is needed for understanding the bible

Discussion Questions for the Seminar

1. Do you believe there are biases against women in the church today? If yes, do you believe the biases are part of God's design for the human race?

2. How do you believe women in the Bible are portrayed? Seductress, temptress or co-heir to the Kingdom?

3. Do you believe that church leaders should be required to speak out against all abuse, especially abuse towards women?

4. Do you believe that women have the God-given right to take leadership roles in: churches, workplace and the family?

5. Do you believe that questioning God can lead to spiritual growth?

6. Do you believe that Black women are oppressed by society?

APPENDIX G

BIBLICAL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS AND EXTRA READINGS

Biblical Homework Assignments and Extra Readings

Genesis 3:1-16

New International Version (NIV)

The Fall

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made.
He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the
garden'?" [2] The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the
garden, [3] but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the
garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" [4] "You will not certainly die," the
serpent said to the woman. [5] "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be
opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [6] When the woman saw that
the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for
gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was
with her, and he ate it. [7] Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized
they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.
[8] Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the
garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the
garden. [9] But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" [10] He answered, "I heard
you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." [11] And he said, "Who
told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to
eat from?" [12] The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit
from the tree, and I ate it." [13] Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you
have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." [14] So the LORD God
said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of
your life. [15] And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your
offspring[a] and hers; he will crush[b] your head, and you will strike his heel." [16] To the
woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor
you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule
over you."

Esther 1:1-20 New International Version (NIV)

Queen Vashti Deposed

This is what happened during the time of Xerxes,[a] the Xerxes who ruled over 127
provinces stretching from India to Cush[b]: 2 At that time King Xerxes reigned from his
royal throne in the citadel of Susa, 3 and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet
for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and
the nobles of the provinces were present.

4 For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and
glory of his majesty. 5 When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven
days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the
greatest who were in the citadel of Susa. 6 The garden had hangings of white and blue
linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble
pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble,
mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. 7 Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one
different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's
liberality. 8 By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions,
for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished. 9 Queen
Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes. 10 On the
seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven
eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and
Karkas— 11 to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to
display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. 12 But when the
attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king
became furious and burned with anger. 13 Since it was customary for the king to consult
experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the
times 14 and were closest to the king—Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres,
Marsena and Memukan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to
the king and were highest in the kingdom. 15 "According to law, what must be done to
Queen Vashti?" he asked. "She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the
eunuchs have taken to her." 16 Then Memukan replied in the presence of the king and the
nobles, "Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the
nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. 17 For the queen's conduct
will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say,
'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not
come.' 18 This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard
about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There
will be no end of disrespect and discord. 19 "Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue
a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be
repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the
king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. 20 Then when the
king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their
husbands, from the least to the greatest."

Judges 4 New International Version (NIV)

Deborah

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, now that Ehud was dead. [2] So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. [3] Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help. [4] Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading[a] Israel at that time. [5] She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. [6] She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. [7] I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'" [8] Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." [9] "Certainly I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. [10] There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him. [11] Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law,[b] and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh. [12] When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, [13] Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron. [14] Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. [15] At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot. [16] Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left. [17] Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite. [18] Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. [19] "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. [20] "Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone in there?' say 'No.'" [21] But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died. [22] Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead. [23] On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. [24] And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

Judges 5 New International Version (NIV)

The Song of Deborah

On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: [2] "When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the LORD!
[3] "Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I, even I, will sing to[a] the LORD; I will praise the LORD, the God of Israel, in song. [4] "When you, LORD, went out from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. [5] The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel. [6] "In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned; travelers took to winding paths. [7] Villagers in Israel would not fight; they held back until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel. [8] God chose new leaders when war came to the city gates, but not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel. [9] My heart is with Israel's princes, with the willing volunteers among the people. Praise the LORD! [10] "You who ride on white donkeys, sitting on your saddle blankets, and you who walk along the road, consider [11] the voice of the singers[b] at the watering places. They recite the victories of the LORD, the victories of his villagers in Israel. "Then the people of the LORD went down to the city gates. [12] 'Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song! Arise, Barak! Take captive your captives, son of Abinoam.' [13] "The remnant of the nobles came down; the people of the LORD came down to me against the mighty. [14] Some came from Ephraim, whose roots were in Amalek; Benjamin was with the people who followed you. From Makir captains came down, from Zebulun those who bear a commander's[c] staff. [15] The princes of Issachar were with Deborah; yes, Issachar was with Barak, sent under his command into the valley. In the districts of Reuben there was much searching of heart. [16] Why did you stay among the sheep pens[d] to hear the whistling for the flocks? In the districts of Reuben there was much searching of heart. [17] Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan. And Dan, why did he linger by the ships? Asher remained on the coast and stayed in his coves.
[18] The people of Zebulun risked their very lives; so did Naphtali on the terraced fields.
[19] "Kings came, they fought, the kings of Canaan fought. At Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo, they took no plunder of silver. [20] From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera. [21] The river Kishon swept them away, the age-old river, the river Kishon. March on, my soul; be strong! [22] Then thundered the horses' hooves—galloping, galloping go his mighty steeds. [23] 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD. 'Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the LORD, to help the LORD against the mighty.' [24] "Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women. [25] He asked for water, and she gave him milk; in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk. [26] Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman's hammer. She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. [27] At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay. At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead. [28] "Through the window peered Sisera's mother; behind the lattice she cried out, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why is the clatter of his chariots delayed?' [29] The wisest of her ladies answer her; indeed, she keeps saying to herself, [30] 'Are they not finding and dividing the spoils: a

woman or two for each man, colorful garments as plunder for Sisera, colorful garments embroidered, highly embroidered garments for my neck—all this as plunder?' [31] "So may all your enemies perish, LORD! But may all who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength." Then the land had peace forty years.

Genesis 30 New International Version (NIV)

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" [2] Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" [3] Then she said, "Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her." [4] So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, [5] and she became pregnant and bore him a son. [6] Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan.[a] [7] Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. [8] Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali.[b] [9] When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. [10] Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. [11] Then Leah said, "What good fortune!"[c] So she named him Gad.[d] [12] Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. [13] Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.[e] [14] During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." [15] But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" "Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." [16] So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night. [17] God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. [18] Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband." So she named him Issachar.[f] [19] Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. [20] Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.[g] [21] Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah. [22] Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive. [23] She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." [24] She named him Joseph,[h] and said, "May the LORD add to me another son."

Jacob's Flocks Increase

25 After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can
go back to my own homeland. 26 Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served
you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you." 27 But
Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by
divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you." 28 He added, "Name your
wages, and I will pay them." 29 Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you
and how your livestock has fared under my care. 30 The little you had before I came has
increased greatly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when
may I do something for my own household?" 31 "What shall I give you?" he asked.
"Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will
go on tending your flocks and watching over them: 32 Let me go through all your flocks
today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb
and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. 33 And my honesty will
testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any
goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-
colored, will be considered stolen." 34 "Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said."
35 That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the
speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored
lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. 36 Then he put a three-day journey
between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.
37 Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made
white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the
branches. 38 Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they
would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in
heat and came to drink, 39 they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that
were streaked or speckled or spotted. 40 Jacob set apart the young of the flock by
themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to
Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's
animals. 41 Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches
in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, 42 but if the
animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban
and the strong ones to Jacob. 43 In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and
came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

2 Samuel 11 New International Version (NIV)

David and Bathsheba

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. 2 One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, 3 and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." 4 Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. 5 The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant." 6 So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. 7 When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. 8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. 9 But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house. 10 David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?" 11 Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents,[a] and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" 12 Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. 13 At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home. 14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. 15 In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." 16 So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. 17 When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died. 8 Joab sent David a full account of the battle. 19 He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, 20 the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? 21 Who killed Abimelek son of Jerub-Besheth[b]? Didn't a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?' If he asks you this, then say to him, 'Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.'" 22 The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. 23 The messenger said to David, "The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. 24 Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." 25 David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.' Say this to encourage Joab." 26 When Uriah's wife

heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. [27] After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

Matthew 1:18-25 New International Version (NIV)

Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about[a]: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. [19] Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet[b] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. [20] But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[c] because he will save his people from their sins." [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"[d] (which means "God with us"). [24] When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. [25] But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Genesis 21 New International Version (NIV)

The Birth of Isaac

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. [2] Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. [3] Abraham gave the name Isaac[a] to the son Sarah bore him. [4] When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. [5] Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. [6] Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." [7] And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

[8] The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a
great feast. [9] But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham
was mocking, [10] and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for
that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." [11] The matter
distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. [12] But God said to him, "Do not
be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you,
because it is through Isaac that your offspring[b] will be reckoned. [13] I will make the son
of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring." [14] Early the next morning
Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her
shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the
Desert of Beersheba. [15] When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one
of the bushes. [16] Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought,
"I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she[c] began to sob. [17] God heard the
boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is
the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. [18] Lift
the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation." [19] Then
God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with
water and gave the boy a drink. [20] God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the
desert and became an archer. [21] While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got
a wife for him from Egypt.

The Treaty at Beersheba

[22] At that time Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God
is with you in everything you do. [23] Now swear to me here before God that you will not
deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country
where you now reside as a foreigner the same kindness I have shown to you." [24] Abraham
said, "I swear it." [25] Then Abraham complained to Abimelek about a well of water that
Abimelek's servants had seized. [26] But Abimelek said, "I don't know who has done this.
You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today." [27] So Abraham brought sheep and
cattle and gave them to Abimelek, and the two men made a treaty. [28] Abraham set apart
seven ewe lambs from the flock, [29] and Abimelek asked Abraham, "What is the meaning
of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?" [30] He replied, "Accept these
seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well." [31] So that place was called
Beersheba,[d] because the two men swore an oath there. [32] After the treaty had been made
at Beersheba, Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of
the Philistines. [33] Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on
the name of the LORD, the Eternal God. [34] And Abraham stayed in the land of the
Philistines for a long time.

Romans 16 New International Version (NIV)

Personal Greetings

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon[a][b] of the church in Cenchreae. [2] I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. [3] Greet Priscilla[c] and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. [4] They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. [5] Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. [6] Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. [7] Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among[d] the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. [9] Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. [10] Greet Apelles, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. [11] Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. [12] Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. [13] Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. [14] Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the other brothers and sisters with them. [15] Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them. [16] Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings. [17] I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. [18] For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. [19] Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. [20] The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. [21] Timothy, my co-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Jews. [22] I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. [23] Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. [24] [e] [25] Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, [26] but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from[f] faith— [27] to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

APPENDIX H

POST SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE TEST RESULTS

POST SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE TEST RESULTS

	SA	A	NO	D	SD
1.	0%	0%	0%	70%	30%
2.	0%	50%	40%	10%	0%
3.	30%	70%	0%	0%	0%
4.	10%	30%	10%	50%	0%
5.	20%	30%	50%	0%	0%
6.	40%	50%	10%	0%	0%
7.	0%	50%	30%	20%	0%
8.	20%	40%	40%	0%	0%

APPENDIX I

EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you describe to me your overall experience for this training?

2. Do you feel because of this training your life will be impacted any differently?

3. Do you have a better understanding of interpreting scripture and do you feel empowered to help other women?

4. Do you have any thoughts on oppression and patriarchy?

5. Did you discover your purpose as a result of this training?

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